OTHER EYES THAN OURS

RONALD A. KNOX

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RAKnox

Nov. 1. 1939.

OTHER EYES THAN OURS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE
SANCTIONS: A FRIVOLITY
A BOOK OF ACROSTICS
THE VIADUCT MURDER

OTHER EYES THAN OURS

BY

RONALD A. KNOX

Do we indeed desire the dead
  Should still be near us at our side?
  Is there no baseness we would hide,
No inner vileness that we dread?

—*In Memoriam*

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OTHER EYES THAN OURS

CHAPTER I

THE HUNT FOR GAEDKE

THE world we live in is not really a single circle, as they draw it for you in the maps. It is a whole tangle of circles which only intersect at intervals; and the circumference of each is a brick wall which pens in the lives of the inmates. Look round you in your railway-carriage; that young man in the corner is reading *The Egg-Fancier*; his *vis-à-vis* is cherishing an organ whose title is not so easy to catch—is he, perhaps, ashamed of it? At last he lays it down beside him; what did I say? It is *The Chiropodist.* The lady next door is less reticent; in fact, I think she tends to flourish her review in the faces of her fellow-passengers—*The Herald of the Star*; she will be an Anglo-Israelite or a Theosophist. Behold yourself, then, for that fractional part of a life which your railway journey constitutes, forming a tangent with three of these circles, an Egg-world, a Foot-world, and a Patent-religion-world! Did I not hear the other day from the editor of *The Paper Container*, which has no

interest, I take it, except for those who are engaged in the manufacture of paper bags and cardboard boxes? The world, I say, is a complex of such worlds, and of these worlds the most ancient and the most honourable is that of classical scholarship. It is also the most acrimonious; those few who breathe its rare atmosphere are for ever at war with one another over issues which the groundling might be in danger of thinking unimportant—the root of a Greek verb, a reading in some dusty old manuscript, the right way to turn on a Roman bath or to fold a Roman tunic.

Such a man was Harold Shurmur, of Salisbury College in the University of Oxford; the hero of this story, if it be the hero's office to persist from the first page to the last, to strive, to endure, and to seem (for he lives only in a book world) to have attained. He had been born and bred in a country parsonage, where the classical tradition still lingered and was formative; his father had been a scholar of his College, and might, but for inertia, have been an author. Volumes, not altogether undusted, of Heyne's Virgil and Paley's Euripides lined the shelves in the tobacco-incensed study where little Harold did his first lessons; busts of Homer and Socrates peered at him from above as he sat, cushioned for height on a Greek Lexicon, over his copy-books. At an age when other children are still spellbound with fairy-stories, he was conversant with the eternal triangle of *amo*, *amas*, *amat*, and could give you the Greek for "the crocodile moves his upper jaw" before he had begun to shed his own first teeth. Perhaps his imagination was a little starved; paternity meant to him a mysterious inti-

macy with the gender rhymes, and the priestly office was seen through a mist of enclitic particles. But of the practical value of his education there could (at that age) be no doubt; he won a good scholarship at a school of his father's own choosing, and the exacter Muses claimed him early for their votary and their thrall.

His classical career was one of easy success; and if he missed a first in Greats, it must be attributed to the defects of his qualities, for he occupied almost the entire time allowed for his moral philosophy paper in discussing a doubtful reading at the beginning of Aristotle's Ethics. The accident may be said to have determined his career; he abandoned all dreams of the Civil Service, and accepted as his life's mission, at the age of twenty-two, a fellowship and classical lectureship at Salisbury. The Latin poets had always been his hobby; and now, a prey to the virus that leads clever men to specialize, he resolved to achieve fame as the last and indispensable authority on the satires of Persius. The names of Persius and of Shurmur should henceforth be inseparable. Nor was the choice a rash one; he had little competition to face. Persius (if my reader should chance to lack information on the point) wrote Latin hexameters with all the lucidity of an acrostic editor trying to convey secret information to his country's enemies; and when the painstaking critic has succeeded in establishing the sense of the text, it is not from the literary point of view very rewarding. The satirist remains, then, a closed book for most people, occasionally quarried for difficult Unseens; and the man

who undertakes to edit him becomes, almost automatically, THE Persius scholar of his generation. It is not to be wondered at that (quite apart from the Big Edition) our hero should have become a recognized authority; that "H. S." should have been the initials found under the articles "Persius" and "Satire" in numerous encyclopædias; and that no symposium of classical essays should have seemed complete without a Shurmur article on "The abiding value of Roman satire" or "What Persius means to us."

I have said "THE Persius scholar of his generation"; alas, there is a significant qualification to be made; I meant THE Persius scholar of his generation in England. Monopolies of this kind do not extend beyond the home market, and while Harold Shurmur felt that he was bursting into a silent sea when he reverently handled, at the age of fifty-four, the proofs of his giant edition, a duplicate thrill communicated itself to Professor Otto Gaedke, as he sat down to his own Persius edition in the distant city of Leipzig. The two books appeared almost simultaneously, an ill omen for either author's peace of mind. If their conclusions had in any way coincided, if their interpretations of the text had been even approximately the same, it is to be feared that each would have accused the other of plagiarism. As it was, by an ironical twist of the fate that watches over scholars, the two volumes were discrepant at every point; no reading that Shurmur approved but Gaedke had already stigmatized it as a veritable chimera; no rendering that Gaedke advocated but Shurmur had ruled it out as "not Latin." All the learned organs of Europe reviewed the two works under

a single heading—gall and wormwood to the most modest of authors. In fact, if Gaedke had run away with Shurmur's only and indispensable sister, it is doubtful if Shurmur's hatred would have been more intense, or his violence more explosive.

An interminable controversy arose, desperately boring to the general public, even if it had not been conducted in Latin, between the two men. Each became an insatiable reader and an implacable reviewer of the other's works; each dredged Cicero's Letters for fresh terms of classical abuse to heap on his rival's head. They never met, but each had a picture of the other in his dreams; Gaedke thought of Shurmur as a tall, fatuous creature in check trousers, Shurmur of Gaedke as a gross, bespectacled figure smoking a large pipe and fondling a misshapen dachshund. Long before the European War broke out, Shurmur was a more convinced Teutophobe than the editor of the *National Review*, and Gaedke's alarmist warnings were being rejected by the *Kreuz-Zeitung*. The war itself hardly served to increase the fury of their animosity; they had known the worst long since. Shurmur found no matter for surprise in the use of poisonous gases by the fellow-countrymen of a Gaedke, and Gaedke saw nothing but an expression of the Shurmur-spirit in the atrocity of the *Baralong*. It is on record that Shurmur, though nearing sixty and C3 at the best of times, tried to volunteer so as to meet Gaedke in single combat, and, rejected, was hardly dissuaded from joining the R.A.M.C. in the hope of mutilating his corpse: were documents forthcoming, we should doubtless find that the German

kept up his end of the quarrel. But it was not to be; Destiny shielded them, like Æneas and Achilles, from a personal encounter.

It was during the war that Mr. Shurmur scored the victory of his life; if the truth must be told, it ranked far higher in his mind than any successful military operation of the period. An Italian scholar, investigating the library of an old monastery, came across a scrap of an old psalter which was clearly a palimpsest. It was not large, but who could tell what treasure of antiquity might lie buried beneath the careful monastic script? The words of King David, or more probably an anonymous Maccabee, needed no preservation; there were already plenty of copies in existence. After laboriously treating the documents with chemicals, he was rewarded by discovering about a dozen lines of Persius; it was a well-known passage, and the Italian did not think much of his discovery. But for Mr. Shurmur it was a document of vast importance. For here was one of his own conjectural restorations actually corroborated by a manuscript of unquestioned age. Shurmur had said it was subjunctive, and here, in the manuscript, subjunctive it was. More than that, Shurmur's subjunctive had been the target of bitter raillery from Gaedke; he had written a whole article against it in the *Zeitschrift* for Something-or-other, held it up to the ridicule of the learned public as an altogether Shurmurworthy monstrosity. And here was proof! He had Gaedke by the short hairs.

Unfortunately, however, there was a war on; and the laborious process of importing enemy books through

a long mangle of censorship kept Shurmur waiting, it seemed interminably. When at last the welcome parcel arrived, the actual issue of the *Zeitschrift* in which the find must necessarily be reported, in which Gaedke would have to comment, if he had the face to comment, upon its disclosures, Shurmur opened it as a man opens a telegram relating to his child's illness. A shock awaited him on the very first page. He saw a lengthy obituary column, with two black crosses at the top to indicate its subject. And between the two crosses, looking like a corrupt passage in a classical author, stood the name of Otto Gaedke.

Among its other numerous disadvantages, Death has this to answer for—it disturbs our scale of values. Life is full of relationships so trivial, so undignified, that Death strikes a false note when it enters into them. Two lovers, for example, naturally think of the moment, and speak with pathos of the moment, when Death will part them. Nobody thinks of the moment when Death will part him from his dentist. It is a cruel, brutal thing when you see it shorn of all its paraphernalia of tragedy. Its announcement excites no recognizable emotions, only that sort of paralysis of the emotions which we call " a shock." Mr. Shurmur felt shocked. That is to say, when his eye first met the paragraph he experienced, just for a fraction of a second, that barbaric content which springs from the knowledge that your enemy is out of the way. The next instant, centuries of civilization had reasserted their control, and he was saying " Tut, tut, poor fellow ! " with some approach to pity. And yet, what pity could he really feel ? Gaedke had

been to him not a living person but a hostile influence ; he did not know whether the man was married, had children, was a Christian, had a taste for wine, and music, and friendships ; Shurmur's hairdresser was a more living person to him than this enemy over whom he had spilt so much ink these twenty years past. He was only conscious of the occurrence, really, as a gap in his own intellectual life.

And then a horrid doubt began to obtrude itself into his mind. That manuscript, that palimpsest from Viterbo—had it been published in time ? The *Zeitschrift*, indeed, gave it in full ; war or no war, the information had penetrated to Leipzig. But the article about it was clearly written by an alien hand. Had Gaedke died impenitent ? Or had he been brought to acknowledge, even with his last breath, that the subjunctive WAS a subjunctive ? Mr. Shurmur went to chapel on Sunday evenings, but he was not a religious man. He did not find himself speculating as to the whereabouts of Professor Gaedke's soul, or the facilities which it might enjoy for securing information on archæological points. Had he thought of it, he must have conceived of a disembodied Gaedke, like the heroes who still washed their chariots and groomed their horses, editing Persius in the Underworld. But Mr. Shurmur's horizon was at that time limited by death ; he wanted to know whether his enemy had, while yet alive, tasted the bitterness of disappointed dogmatism. The moment of his death was accurately chronicled, but the report of the Italian find was not properly documented ; it came clumsily concealed as a telegraphic message from Lugano. Had the sub-

junctive forced its way to the sick man's bedside; had the knowledge of it, perhaps, killed him? Or had it come too late, and found the blinds already drawn, and solemn-faced mourners moving about the untenanted rooms?

What happened next it is not easy to determine. Some will have it that Shurmur's mind gave way; the double strain, they say, of writing his "Retractationes Persianæ" and discharging his less congenial functions at the Board of Butter Control was too much even for his admirably poised intellect. Whatever be the explanation, the fact is indisputable; from that moment forward he became a man of one idea—he must know whether Gaedke ever heard of the Viterbo palimpsest or not. When the war was over, he actually paid a rather ungenerous visit to Leipzig, but was unable to discover who had been present at the death-bed, or where Frau Widow Professor Gaedke lived. The notebooks of the lamented scholar were piously edited after his death, but afforded no information. Baffled, Mr. Shurmur returned to Oxford, his mind still brooding over one thought, his eyes still troubled with the age-long riddle of mortality. While so many thousands in England were exercised over the death and the destiny of those they loved, he lived but for one desire—to be in communication, though it were only for a moment, with whatever consciousness had survived the bodily dissolution of his enemy.

In fact—it might easily have been foreseen—Mr. Shurmur took to Spiritualism. And, if you lived in Oxford, to be interested in Spiritualism was necessarily to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Haltwhistle. With

Dr. Haltwhistle we are not here concerned; he was an insignificant man, obscurely engaged in some work connected with University extension. His wife was a far more masterful character; circumstances had placed her in a University town, but they should not cramp her ambitions. She was one of forty-two ladies in the same street who had hit upon the idea of establishing a *salon* for undergraduates on Sunday afternoons, and she held better cards than most of her rivals. She was a fine-looking woman, though well on in life; she was also what is called a clever woman; that is to say, she had read a good deal, and kept carefully up to date in her reading. She was progressive in a vague sort of way, and found it easy to lure into her house second-class lions of the Progressive kind; members of the Labour Party who had never been labourers, artists who were listened to but not bought, literary men who would recite their own poems if you were not careful. That she was a blue-stocking must, I am afraid, be admitted; but the undergraduate mind is still too young to analyse its discomforts and label its dislikes; people went on calling, and if the flow of visitors showed signs of interruption, she had a useful niece who could be summoned up from the country, to restore the goodwill of the establishment.

An Agnostic, born too late to share the agnostic enthusiasm, Mrs. Haltwhistle dabbled, whenever fashion seemed to dictate it, in strange cults. Spiritualism caught her on the rebound just after the war; she had not loved and lost, but she was badly in need of some attraction to make her *salon* popular again in the rapidly re-filling Colleges. Spiritualism, she

decided, it must be; it was mysterious, it was more or less fashionable; it cost nothing and committed you to nothing. She could not, indeed, practise the orgies of this cult on Sunday afternoons, when youth most flocked to her side. The house immediately opposite was tenanted by a retired clergyman of ferociously Evangelical views, whose habit it was to gather round him, on these same Sunday afternoons, a small but raucous company of young gentlemen who sang hymns in complete disregard of the neighbourhood. You cannot really concentrate when people just over the way are announcing their intention of sweeping through the gates of the New Jerusalem; and protest elicited no reply except a perfect torrent of tracts. For business purposes, then, she had to fall back upon evening dinner-parties; but it was useful, meanwhile, to tell people what their auras were like, and to cultivate a far-away look, which suggested a character at once masterful and misunderstood.

It must be confessed that when Mr. Shurmur first met Mrs. Haltwhistle she both alarmed and annoyed him. The fair sex played no part in his life; he never called in North Oxford, and when young ladies came to his lectures (which was rare, for it is not easy to affect Persius, even in Somerville) he always turned his back towards them as far as possible and made no allusion to their presence. But there was one function of the year at which it was impossible to avoid the skirted (or, as it seemed to him, the kilted) animal—the Master's annual garden-party. On one of these hated occasions Mrs. Haltwhistle sailed in, found the wretched man uncomfortably wedged in a corner,

and took him in hand. She knew nothing of his secret sorrow; it would have been difficult, even for one who boasted of being *sympathique*, to have guessed it. But it was one of her relaxations to tempt the hermit crab out of its shell; the very difficulty of the process turned it into a sport. During one of the rather frequent pauses in his part of the conversation she turned on him with a favourite remark of hers:

"Now, I wonder what you're thinking about. You know, when you very learned people are silent like that, I always imagine you must be thinking out some abstruse problem in philosophy, and not paying any attention to your company at all."

"Eh—ah—oh—what?" said Mr. Shurmur, straining at the leash. "Not a bit; what I mean is, no, nothing in particular."

"I suppose, when you say you're thinking of nothing, you mean you're not thinking of anything? But we believe that's oh, so different!"

Mr. Shurmur was plainly distressed. He had no notion what she meant; it seemed to him he must have fallen into conversation with a madwoman. He said "Silly woman, silly woman!" under his breath, which was his impolite but fortunately inaudible habit. Then he added, "Don't see much difference, eh? Don't see much difference."

"Ah, but surely," objected Mrs. Haltwhistle, "when you don't think of anything you're relaxing your mind; when you think of nothing you concentrate; and nothing is so hard as to concentrate on Nothing. That's the way we look at it."

"We" again—what could she be? Roman Catholic?

High Church? He said to himself, "Don't know what the woman's talking about," and to her, "Then why concentrate?"

"Ah!" she said. "Do you think we've found out nearly as much as we're meant to find out about what lies behind things, beyond the veil? You've heard of thought-transference—of people at a distance from each other knowing what each other—each knowing what the other was thinking about?"

"Yes, I suppose so. They say so. I don't know," snapped the unfortunate man.

"Well," she persisted, "doesn't that mean that there are thought-waves travelling about the world, like sound-waves, you know? And how do we know, Mr. Shurmur, that those thought-waves come to an end with—with death?" She disapproved of the word, but used it because the man seemed so stupid.

She could not have struck a happier note. In a moment the tortured mind of the scholar saw a new avenue of release. What if Gaedke's waves were permanent? What if it should still be possible to find out about that subjunctive? "Never thought of it like that," he said. "Excuse me, are you a Thing-umbob, you know what I mean, Spiritualist?"

"Well, I'm a seeker. We can all be that, I suppose. But I'm afraid all this bores you?"

"Not at all. Don't know anything about it, of course; it's never come my way, but, you know, it sounds to me as if it might be, well, just what I want."

"Of course," she said sweetly, "I'd forgotten!" She knew nothing at all about Mr. Shurmur, not even whether he was married, but she leaped to the con-

clusion, then rather natural, that he had loved and lost; a son or a brother had been killed, and he was troubled. He had come to the right person! "I suppose you, like so many others, feel the loss terribly bitter?"

"Loss? Loss? What loss?"

"I mean, I suppose you feel that you would give anything to get in touch with *him*, even if it were only for a few short moments; to exchange confidences; to know what *he* thought and thinks about it all?"

"Yes, yes, that's just it. What he thinks about it all." Then he added, with a sudden chuckle, "The old brute!"

Mrs. Haltwhistle was slightly taken aback. It seemed such an odd way of expressing affection for the departed. However, she was not going to leave such a promising convert half-made. "And perhaps," she added, "he wants to hear from you too. Perhaps there was some misunderstanding between you, and you would like him to know how differently you feel about it now?"

"Differently? Good God, madam, differently! Why, that's the whole point! I said it was subjunctive all the time, and it WAS subjunctive; Viterbensis proved it—you saw it in the papers? You must have seen it in the papers?"

Mrs. Haltwhistle was now being thoroughly paid out for any mystification she herself may have caused. However, she saw that the scholar was off on his own hobby, and was too wise to follow him; in Oxford it is not thought good manners to understand other people's subjects. "I expect I did," she admitted

guardedly, " but then, you know, that kind of thing's not in my line. But I see what it is ; you want to prove you were in the right."

" I *have* proved I was in the right. The world knows now that it was a subjunctive. What I want to be sure of is that Gaedke knew before he died——"

" Passed over," amended Mrs. Haltwhistle with a slight shudder.

" Hopped across, slunk out by the back way, anything you like ! But did he know ? Or does he know now ? "

" Really, Mr. Shurmur, how am I to say ? We know, of course, that there is illumination on the other side, but it is gradual, very gradual illumination."

" It would have to be," said Mr. Shurmur ungraciously, " with Gaedke."

" Anyhow, why not find out for yourself ? Why not come round to us one evening when we are having a *séance,* and we will try to get in touch with Gaedke himself ? "

In such curious circumstances it was that Mr. Shurmur became a Spiritualist. But it cannot be said that his initial attempts at establishing communication were a notable success. The conversation, when Planchette was consulted, ran something like this :

Are you Professor Gaedke ?

Yes, ducky. (" It's the control," explained Mrs. Haltwhistle.)

How can you prove it ? Speak to us in German.

Comment vous portez-vous ? Ha, ha !

We wish you to speak to us in German.

Hoch der Kaiser !

The Kaiser has abdicated. Did you not know that the Kaiser has abdicated?

I am *the Kaiser.*

Are you Professor Gaedke?

Yes, that is me—Kaiser Gucky.

We want you to speak to us in Latin.

Niminy piminy jiminy sæcula sæculorum.

Are you Professor Gaedke?

No. I'm Professor Latin.

Did you ever see Codex Viterbensis?

Don't you dare! I won't have it!

We wish to know whether Professor Gaedke ever saw Codex Viterbensis . . .

At this point the writing suddenly tailed off into a string of violent obscenities. It was unfortunate; Mrs. Haltwhistle said she thought it was Shurmur's fault; his aura was too purple. And something always seemed to go wrong; they tried to get in touch with Persius, but Persius disappointed them by stating that he died in 360 B.C. Nothing ever made them feel certain that Professor Gaedke was answering, and even when the answers purported to come from him, they headed off all references to Viterbo and the subjunctive mood with torrents of abuse. Gradually Shurmur began to be interested in the thing for its own sake; it provided a distraction for him, and he needed distractions if he was to avoid falling into a monomania. But he never became a real student in this field; always at the back of his mind the hope of confronting Gaedke with his error lurked and was operative. He went to lectures, and read up the literature; and always when there was reference to fuller knowledge

beyond the grave his heart beat faster with the thought that " on the other side " they knew all there was to be known about the subjunctive. And so it happened that the simple scholar—for he was simple in all that did not pertain to the Latin poetry of the early Empire —was drawn into that curious form of commerce with unseen things which it will be the business of the following chapters to commemorate.

CHAPTER II

THE ECCENTRIC'S DISCOVERY

IT may seem strange when I record the fact (but what is the use of facts if one does not record them ?) that Harold Shurmur had a friend.

The secret dispositions of Providence may be admired under a thousand headings, in the exact symmetry, the perfect finish, the uncanny correspondence of created things. That the bee, for example, should go to the flowers for honey, and that there should be honey in the flowers for the bee when it gets there ; that the spider, not being agile enough to chase the fly, should pay out a rope from its inner consciousness (an art we human beings have never learned) and stock its larder in that way ; that the human hand, an atrophied foot to all appearance, should be capable of performing a thousand different manœuvres, so common that we have forgotten to notice them—such rudimentary marvels as these not all the biology in the world can rob of their surprisingness. Nor is it less a matter for wonder, to anyone who has watched the human animal in the mass, that with all the groups it forms, the attractions and repulsions it displays, friendships are for ever cropping

up in the unlikeliest places, so that there is always a friend left over even for the least pleasant and the least adaptable of our species.

Take Harold Shurmur, for example. To look at him, to hear about him, to know him casually, you would have said that he was destined to live unbefriended, he was Nature's odd man out. In person he was plain and a little stout; a bristling moustache added a quite unnecessary touch of ferocity. In his dress and in the general cultivation of his exterior there was nothing of the scholar's picturesque disarray; he was dressed tidily, but not right; his collar always too high, the tie which it enclosed forming a scalene triangle with a slight list to starboard. His speech was fierce and sudden; a habit of intermittent snorting rendered it the more displeasing. His work absorbed (you would have said) all the surplus of mental energy which most of us reserve for our follies; his daily walk up Headington Hill was unaccompanied, except when it was shared by a bored and terrified freshman; he spent most of his vacation in Oxford, and heaved no sigh of regret when the undergraduates went down. He had never asked anybody to marry him, and probably it would have made no difference if he had. Yet Nature, who abhors a vacuum even in the heart of a pedant, had given him a friend.

In his school days (if we except the moustache) he had been much what he was at the time of which I am writing; he was not unpopular, he was not ragged, he was simply left alone with that chilling neglect which schoolboys use towards the ugly duckling. But, as water finds its own level, so one lonely

boy at school instinctively pairs off with another. Godfrey Minshull, the other here in question, had not been marooned by his schoolfellows ; from some native streak of misanthropy he had cut adrift from them. He was athletic, but hated games ; he had the ordinary graces of life, but repelled approach ; he was full of ideas, but found himself too bored to express them. When he walked into school, or chapel, or to games (the Noachic method of procession ruled on such occasions, here as at most schools), he let others pass him by, and paired off defiantly with the wallflower. So grew up a dull, stolid school friendship, destined to last a lifetime. There were no tastes in common ; Shurmur even at that age was seldom away from his books, Minshull generally engaged in an attempt to borrow other people's. Shurmur won few laurels outside the classics ; Minshull betrayed a languid interest in natural science. Shurmur, finally, never gave any trouble to his masters ; Minshull was a confirmed practical joker, and claimed that there was no master on the staff whom he had not fooled. They went on to Oxford together, still inseparable ; and while Shurmur was forming the stock-in-trade of a European reputation, Minshull went down without taking a degree.

The younger son of a rich family, with no taste for matrimony, he had drifted about the world for the most part of a lifetime, seeing much, doing a good deal, achieving nothing. His early aloofness from his fellows had settled down into an impatient hatred of mankind—its petty intrigues, its scramble for money, its worship of the modern and of the moment. It was

his conviction that the early part of old age was the only time of life worth living for; all the rest of his career should be a sort of cocktail to whet his appetite for this. He would have his memory well-lined, his bodily faculties sound, his mind uncreased by cares, doubts, and the bitter after-taste of unpleasant incidents. He would live with familiar books and wines he could answer for, with a little land and as few neighbours as possible. His only hobby was still science; and it was understood that he was making researches in wireless telegraphy, an art whose processes fascinated while its results disgusted him. Soon after the war, soon after the events outlined in the foregoing chapter, he had bought an old house in the Cotswolds, moderate in size but perfect in design, and was there settling down, an epicure in life, to his long-desired banquet of maturity.

Post-war Oxford inspired him with unconcealed irritation; it was full, he said, of parsons on motor-bicycles and women disguised as Magdalen choir-boys. But he was forced to use it as his shopping-centre, for there was still space on his shelves, and bookshops tempted him. About once in a fortnight, then, he would make an expedition to the scenes of his youth, and while he waited for his train to carry him home it was his custom to take refuge in Shurmur's rooms at Salisbury. If Shurmur was in, they talked a little; if he was out, it was not much loss, for theirs was the kind of intimacy which is sustained almost as easily by sitting in a man's arm-chair as by listening to his voice. So he sat one morning, soon after Shurmur had found his spiritualist faith; the scholar was

present, but so busy fiddling about with an array of visiting-cards (the rough material of a future " Index Persianus ") that he seldom had time to do more than throw his friend an occasional remark over his averted shoulder. Minshull sat, long inured to such neglect, turning over the pages of a book he had taken down at random from the shelf.

" Dante, now," he said suddenly, following some train of thought as if he had been thinking aloud all the time, " what a chance he got ! What a superb formula, and yet nobody had ever exploited it properly before his time ! "

" What ? Oh, yes," said Shurmur, without looking up.

" To be able to consign all one's pet rivals to appropriate hells, what a feast for the imagination ! Almost as good as if he'd really seen the thing. Think, Shurmur, if you'd written a Divina Commedia, with Persius instead of Virgil as showman ; with a special bolgia for those who did violence to grammar, and Gaedke at the bottom of it ! "

" I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Minshull. I try not to think about Gaedke, since he crossed over."

" Since he—what ? I say, Shurmur, you haven't turned Spiritualist or anything, have you ? "

" Been to some of their meetings. A woman I know, you know, in North Oxford."

" Ha ! You old dog ! " Out of the recesses of his Victorian consciousness Minshull wagged a roguish forefinger. " What's the young lady's name ? "

" She isn't young. Silly woman, very silly woman ;

Mrs. Haltwhistle. Still, it's all very well to talk, but I believe there's something in it, Minshull. More than you think, anyhow."

Minshull looked curiously at the rounded shoulders, but said nothing. For a quarter of an hour or more he sat, still turning over the pages of his book. Then "It's funny, Shurmur, that you should be interested in that sort of thing. Because, as a matter of fact, I've been rather wanting to consult somebody who was. But I wouldn't have expected you, of all people."

Shurmur hated being consulted. "Don't know anything about it, really. Better talk to Mrs. Haltwhistle."

"No, you'll do. I hate explaining things to women. Stop playing spillikins."

Shurmur faced round reluctantly. "Well, go on. What's your trouble?"

"Do you know anything about wireless?"

"I listened-in once."

"Heaven help you! If I asked whether you knew anything about motors, would you tell me you once rode on a 'bus? You know nothing about how the thing works?"

"Chalmers tried to explain it to me, but I've forgotten."

"All right. We will be simple, then, and untechnical. Think what wireless means, Shurmur—use your imagination, if you've got one. Do you realize that all this broadcasting business doesn't mean producing a whole lot of sounds that weren't there before? It simply means embalming, so to speak, the sounds we were using already, packing them up so as to travel. Your

Persius lectures, for example, though actually they are only heard by half a dozen bored undergraduates, are potentially delivered *urbi et orbi*; they set up echoes which might, if they were properly harnessed, intrigue the public of Kamschatka."

"Bless my soul! Is that so?"

"And it's not only that. We know now that the echoes of our speech are travelling about all through space, only in a dismembered sort of way, so that we can't get at them. But now, what about time? If your voice is echoed by a wall of rock, or by the whispering gallery at St. Paul's, the echoes don't reach the ear of the fellow who's listening to you at the moment at which you speak, but afterwards."

"Go on."

"How do we know, then, that the electrical waves which carry our modulations in the ether ever do die away? How do we know that, if we'd got the right apparatus, you and I couldn't overhear, even at this distance of time, the dying Cæsar saying *Et tu, Brute*?"

"He didn't. The whole point of the story was that he said——"

"Shut up! Well, that's only the ABC of the thing. I'm not investigating, you'll be glad to hear, anything so paltry as that. The line I've been going on is this: if an electrical apparatus makes it possible for us to preserve an audition that would otherwise be lost, isn't it possible that we might contrive to make something audible which has never hitherto been audible to human ears at all?"

"You mean like a loud speaker?"

"No. In the first place because a loud speaker doesn't make the voice sound louder, it only makes it last further. In the second place because loudness has nothing to do with it."

"What has, then?"

"Why, the pitch of the sound itself. You've heard, I suppose, that there are certain people who can't hear the squeak of a bat? It isn't that they're deaf; it's simply that that note is too high for them to catch. There's no question of making the sound louder; if a hundred bats squeaked, they still wouldn't hear—do you see that?"

"I think so. I'm not musical, you know, but I see the sort of idea."

"My argument is this. We know that bats do squeak, because some of us have ears that can catch the sound, though others haven't. How do we know that there aren't sounds going about, real sounds, mark you, which have never yet been heard because nobody in the world has a fine enough sense of hearing to detect them?"

"You mean like animals? That is, I seem to have read somewhere the suggestion that animals do talk, only the sound is so fine that we can't hear it."

"Bunkum, of course. If animals had brains enough to use speech, *a fortiori* they'd have brains enough to use gestures. Did you ever see a cow motioning another cow to be seated? Does a horse ever shrug its shoulders? No, that's all a silly invention. But there's no reason in the nature of things why there shouldn't be sounds going about the world in such a high treble

that we can't catch them. Our range is pretty limited, after all."

"It can't be disproved."

"You mean it can't be proved, either? Well, look here; if I invent a wireless stunt which can actually alter the value of sounds—not just increase their volume, mark you, but actually lower their musical pitch, what happens then?"

"I see the sort of idea."

"Well, I have invented a wireless stunt of that kind. Now do I interest you?"

"And what's happened?"

"I don't know what's happened. I only know that I've been getting things through on my wireless which are inaudible, if you understand me, to the naked ear. What I mean is that with my apparatus you hear things through the head-phones which you can't hear without them."

"What sort of things?"

"Music, principally. At least, I think I've heard voices too, but I couldn't distinguish what they were saying. Now, you'll say at once that I just picked up some music that was going on, say, at the Vicarage. But I can prove it's not that—not to you, because you never knew the first thing about science. But you can put it roughly like this. If I have a microscope of a given power, and know what that power is, then I can tell from the size it looks under the lens that a given insect, say, cannot possibly be visible to the naked eye. Just so; I've got the strength of my apparatus exactly taped, and I can tell for certain that such and such a noise

must, without it, be an inaudible noise. Do you get me? "

" This is important—yes, I think important. You suggest, then, that you have found a new avenue of contact with the spirit world? "

" I don't suggest anything of the kind. I don't know anything about the spirit world, or whether there is one. All I know is that this is outside my beat, and if anybody thinks they can make anything out of it, they're welcome to try."

Mr. Shurmur's eyes positively blazed; a fire of missionary zeal glowed in that improbable bosom. " I say, you really must go and see——"

" No, I won't go and see Mrs. Hogwhistle, or whatever her name is. You've got to run this affair yourself. You've got to come and stay with me, and listen-in with my apparatus. Then you can report to your friends as you like."

" Minshull, it won't do. I don't understand all this business properly. You see, it's a kind of science; there are people who understand far more about it than I do. If I came and listened-in with you, and then tried to describe what had been happening, it would be as if—as if you sent Mrs. Haltwhistle to collate a manuscript of Juvenal. I should make a fool of myself. Let me introduce you to some of these people."

" But I don't want to meet 'em. The worst of your freak religions—excuse my calling it that—is that the people who go in for them always seem to get washed and hung out to dry in the process. Their faces are like great lumps of dough, and their clothes look like

a nursery charade, and they talk to one in earnest voices, full of meaning, so that I want to go away and scream somewhere. Besides, what would be the good of my talking to Mrs. Hogbristle? She'd only have my word for it, and what good would that do? This apparatus of mine isn't the sort of thing you can wrap up and carry about in your waistcoat pocket; it's a very elaborate thing, and it's all over at Warbury. Any experiment that's made has got to be made on the spot."

"I suppose you wouldn't let me bring some of 'em along? Not any of the scarecrow lot, just ordinary people . . ."

"What, to stay at Warbury? Honestly, I don't know that I could stand it. It's only a bachelor's place, you know. I suppose you couldn't make it a bachelor party?"

"Don't think I dare. You see, Mrs. Halt-whistle would never forgive me. She's the kind of woman who regards herself as a sort of honorary bachelor, and she wouldn't understand not being asked."

"That's all very well, but I can't face the strain of entertaining a mixed party at my time of life. Hang it all——"

"You couldn't—you couldn't get Honoria to come and stay? She'd entertain a travelling menagerie, wouldn't she?"

Honoria was Godfrey Minshull's sister, a widow, rather older than himself, and sharing, with some added violence, his Victorian opinions.

"Well, yes," he admitted. "Honoria might do.

But she's down at Sandover now ; I don't suppose I'd be able to get her till March."

" All the better for me. It's hard for me to get away in term time ; the Master's such a fool about wanting to have at least four of the Fellows sleeping in College. Look here, get Honoria to come down in March, and I'll collect two or three people—two or three of the people who really count."

" Why do people always say ' two or three ' when they mean ' four or five ' ? Look here, you can bring over Mrs. What-d'you-call-it, and one other—a man for preference—and have the run of the house for the inside of a week, and put my apparatus to any tests you like —will that satisfy you ? "

" All right ; all right. Don't go and alter your mind, though. I shall be seeing Mrs. Haltwhistle this afternoon, and I'll talk to her about it. Are you staying for some luncheon ? "

" No, thanks. I must get off and catch my train. This place stifles me. I can't think how you fellows go on, week after week, in this atmosphere of damp stone, stuffed arm-chairs, and fish left over from breakfast. Good-bye."

Mrs. Haltwhistle did not receive the stupendous news with that immediate enthusiasm which Shurmur had expected of her. She was excited, sure enough, but she seemed to have an odd idea that " the spirits " might object to the overhearing of their secrets by mechanical artifice when they had not given any directions to that purpose. As a seeker, Mrs. Haltwhistle was hampered by having a dogmatic mind. She welcomed novelties, but she liked them

to come through proper and, so to say, official channels.

Finally, however, she decided to leave it to the results of her daily automatic writing—she used to do automatic writing every day as a sort of religious exercise. The results never seemed to reflect any of that spirit of impish pleasantry which you got only too often at the table. They formed long, continuous essays, of a quite normal and, to tell the truth, rather platitudinous kind. On the following day, then, at half-past six in the evening, Mrs. Haltwhistle composed herself after the distractions of the day by thinking a good deal about nothing ; then she took up her pencil and sat with the point of it resting on a fresh sheet of paper, her eyes half-closed, her limbs free from all restraint and strain. She sat there for a good half-hour, never once looking at what she had written, and when she did so at last, she was rewarded as usual with a good, solid block of prose.

You are on the eve of a great discovery, it ran. *What people do not understand is that the spirits are very close to them all the time. They think of spirits as if they were far away in some distant world, as if messages from them had to come a long distance. This is not true ; the spirit world interpenetrates ours. They are outside space, but they are in space—in this space, ours. This is difficult to understand, because to us space means so much. When the spirits speak to one another, they do not use speech as we do ; that is to say, they do not use a medium by which to express the thoughts which come into their minds. Their minds simply* mind *to one another—create a direct*

impression. But this minding *of spirits has its effect on the material substance around them, especially those spirits which are the least etherealized. We ought to understand that the more we try to do good to one another in this world and to be unselfish and to be tolerant of other people's points of view, the more quickly we shall become etherealized over there. The spirits wish people here to understand this, because it will be a great source of good to us. The* minding *of one spirit to another sets up vibrations in the ether. The spirits use the same ether that we do, only they use it from the inside, as it were, and we from the outside. So that there are sound-waves continually travelling about the ether which come from the* minding *of spirits to one another. It is like impressions made in clay. If we can find a way of intercepting these mind-transferences of the spirits to one another, this will be a great source of good to us, because even the least etherealized spirits know much more than we do; they understand, for example, that the great thing which does harm in the world is self-thinking. We want to* unself *ourselves a great deal, and the spirits wish us to do this as much as possible, only they find it so hard to tell us what they mean. . . .*

The omens thus declared favourable, Mrs. Halt-whistle set to work with all the energy and decision of that Roman general who threw the chickens into the water. She wrote a long letter to Mr. Scoop, that well-known penetrator of the unseen world, marked "Confidential" at each corner and heavily underlined throughout. She described to him as well as she could what had happened, and implored him to make it con-

venient to himself to come down into Oxfordshire in the second week of March. She had not seen Mr. Minshull, and Mr. Shurmur (who was only a neophyte) had not been able to report on the state of his aura ; but he seemed, by all accounts, to be a simple, candid man, who had humbly devoted himself to " science," as the world understood that term. . . . This letter she posted, and then wrote to an agency in London, which dispatched about half a stone of spiritualist literature to the address of Godfrey Minshull, Esq., Warbury Manor, Warbury, Oxon. This fortunately did no harm, because Minshull's butler had permanent orders to destroy immediately all communications addressed to his employer which were not accompanied by a personal letter in ink. The literature thus found its way peacefully into an incinerator without Godfrey Minshull ever knowing of its existence.

Shurmur was always impatient for the term to be over ; " Oxford," he used to say, " would be a pleasant enough place but for the men." He now found himself the victim of an impatience even greater than the common ; he was positively looking forward to the mysteries and the experiences which awaited him at Warbury. Not that he was, even now, a really disinterested student of psychical phenomena for their own sake. But this new discovery, if it was genuine, seemed to open up fresh vistas of possibility ; who knew that we might not one day be in a position to exchange our thoughts with the dead as easily as we exchange them, nowadays, with distant friends ? And if that day came, Shurmur was resolved that the spirit of

Otto Gaedke should enjoy no peace until it was fully acquainted with the text of Codex Viterbensis, and acknowledged the genuineness of that subjunctive from the gates of the tomb.

CHAPTER III

WARBURY MANOR AND ITS GUESTS

I HAVE described Warbury Manor as being in the Cotswolds ; it should be unnecessary to add that it was built of mellow grey stone, with grey tiles that had aged to a rather darker tint ; that the windows were latticed windows, set in heavily mullioned frames, and that it had old, nail-studded doors of seasoned oak. The reader has a right to demand so much when he hears tell of a house in the Cotswolds, and there is no sense in beginning to disappoint the reader as early as the third chapter, when there is still time for him to put down the book unbought. Warbury Manor was what a Manor in the Cotswolds should be, and contrived to add some original features of its own. It had been built in Tudor times, too late for fortification, but too soon to have acquired the inevitable ground-plan of post-Elizabethan houses. It had no front hall, for example ; the architect seemed to assume that you were a plain, blunt fellow who would force your way into the presence and deliver your message, or else take a refusal and be gone. He had also assumed that some visits would be more welcome to the master of the house than others ; or why did he put in, instead of

a single staircase in the middle, two staircases of equal size and importance which trisected the whole building, so as to leave the middle block of living-rooms accessible from two sides at once? No one of the rooms was depressingly large, but there was a fine parlour on the first floor which ran from staircase to staircase, with an open fireplace and stained coats-of-arms in the windows. The walls of it, since Godfrey Minshull took possession, were almost upholstered with books; it was the room in which he passed two-thirds of his waking hours when he was alone; what is more to our purpose, it is the frame in which the imagination of the reader is asked to set our story, if I forget to give him any fresh stage directions.

The landing at the bottom of either staircase ran right through the house, with an outside door at each end; and since neither side had any porch to face the world with, it was left to your preference which you regarded as the front, and which as the back. Indeed, in this respect it seemed admirably designed to mirror the misanthropic mood of its present owner. It lay close to the road, a mere carriage-sweep intervening, and so little care had been taken to paint the gates or to keep up the garden on that side that the whole house had the air of turning its back on you as you approached; it might face the road, architecturally speaking, but, if houses can be credited with eyes, it *looked* in the opposite direction.

And no wonder. For the garden ran down, with no formality of measured terraces, but in a haphazard arrangement of lawns and sloping paths, to the delightful Windrush, cleared here of reeds and overhanging

willow-boughs, navigable for tiny craft. Beyond, the opposite hills rose in leisurely gradation, their shoulders deep in woodland; the lanes sprawled idly this way and that, and lonely church towers marked the distance of neighbouring villages. It was a haunt of peace, meant, perhaps, for the stillness of summer evenings, when only the plashing of cows in the water-meadows and the creaking of far-off hay-wagons disturbed the perfect air, but wonderful even now, in spring-time. Nature, you would say, had as yet not committed herself; her scouts, the primroses, peeped out in clusters amid the moss of the forest land, but she had made no definite promises; the buds on tree and hedgerow seemed to say "Spring is coming—if you are good." A slight haze stole up from the river to greet the ineffective March sun; birds here and there chirped tentatively, as if to say "I suppose this *is* all right?" Such a landscape achieves mystery in all weathers; it was mysterious now.

I do not say that Harold Shurmur, as he walked with his friend along to the terrace, was greatly responsive to the sense of mystery. He was not a Spiritualist born; and it is a character of all the man-made religions that only people of a certain type and of a certain culture harmonize properly with their surroundings. However, he was not conscious of inadequacy. His mind was torn between excitement over the revelations which seemed to be impending, and anxiety over the success of the party; neither host nor guest knows such trepidation of mind as the gooseberry who has stood sponsor for his fellow-guests in a country house. It was bad enough to have quartered Mrs. Haltwhistle,

and a Mr. Scoop whom he (Shurmur) only knew by sight, upon such a paradise. But worse had followed; Mrs. Haltwhistle's niece, a particularly modern young lady, whom he had once met and learned to hate with an everlasting hatred, had insisted on joining the party, and was expected to arrive with her aunt at any moment when the leisurely train of those districts saw fit to wander home.

"It's not your fault," Minshull was saying. "I know her, keep on meeting her in London, when I'm fool enough to go there. Honoria says she's trying to marry me."

"Oh, I say! Marry you! But, Minshull, she doesn't look thirty."

"I know. And she isn't forty. But, you see, she's been flirting hard for nearly fifteen years, and if she'd meant to marry somebody of her own age, Honoria says, she'd have done it already. She's had generations of undergraduates to choose from.—I know you think me very ineligible, Shurmur, and I'm not vain enough to be offended. I'm a great deal nearer sixty than fifty. But then, I'm not poor, and I don't think Miss Rostead would have any objection to being predeceased. Anyhow, she always seems to crop up wherever I go, and she asked herself down here in the most brazen way as soon as she heard that auntie was expected. As I say, it's not your fault."

"Do you know, Minshull, I don't believe any woman ever set her cap at me."

"I don't suppose she did; if she had, you wouldn't have known anything about it till you found yourself signing the register. You lack magnetism somehow.

But perhaps you'll pick up a wife one of these days at a Viva. Hullo! Here's Honoria."

A silver-haired old lady was coming out from one of the garden doors to meet them. She walked with a stick, but there was little infirmity in her tread; it seemed rather as if the stick were a weapon to threaten with, to shake at elderly gentlemen who essayed compliments, or little boys who trespassed in orchards. She radiated force of character; the cynicism which savoured of jaundice in her brother became her delightfully; her malicious comments on the people she did not approve of were uttered with the best temper in the world. She had all the arts of the martinet widow—she was slightly deaf, so that any foolish remark addressed to her might be brought out in its full foolishness; she mispronounced the names of people she didn't like; she left things about so as to test men's manners in finding and returning them to her. As Shurmur said, she would have been capable of entertaining a travelling menagerie. Shurmur himself she tolerated, because he was a friend of Godfrey's; and Shurmur himself found, somehow, that he enjoyed her persistent raillery more than the terrible sympathy of Mrs. Haltwhistle. But for the fact that he tried to shake hands with his hat in his right hand, his "How do you do, Mrs. Varley?" was quite creditable.

"Well, Mr. Shurmur, what have you done with your friends? Godfrey tells me you're bringing them down here to see ghosts."

"Well, not ghosts exactly; what I mean is——"

"Eh, what's that? They don't see ghosts? I hope they're not coming to steal the spoons?"

"It's a sort of—a sort of scien-tif-ic ex-per-i-ment, Mrs. Varley."

"Scientific experiment? I hope they won't make smells. I always think Life has smells enough, don't you? without any Science to help it."

"It's not smells, Mrs. Varley, it's wireless."

"What, are they trying to track down these people who listen-in without a licence?"

"No, it's Godfrey; Godfrey's been hearing things which are inaudible."

"Godfrey must have kept his hearing better than I have. Who are these people, then?"

"They're Spiritualists."

"Well, why did you say they weren't, then? Seeing things which aren't there, and hearing things which aren't there, it's all one. What are their names?"

This was terrible.

"There's a Mr. Scoop."

"Did you say Spoop?"

"No, not Spoop—Scoop. He's a member of the Physical Research Society. And then there's Mrs. Haltwhistle."

"Is she a friend of yours?"

"Woman I know in Oxford. And then there's her niece, Miss Rostead."

"What! Not Kitty Rostead?"

"Yes. You know her."

"Know her! I should think I do. Has she grown a beard yet?"

"Not when I last saw her."

"She will, though. Well, I hope you're prepared to entertain all these people, Mr. Shurmur, because I shall

make some terrible mistakes. Godfrey, have you asked the Abbé ? "

" Yes, he's coming all right."

This was a new development, and had to be explained to Shurmur. " You see," said Mrs. Varley, " I don't like ghosts. So when Godfrey said there were going to be ghosts about, I said we must have a clergyman. Not that most clergymen would know what to say to a ghost if they met one, but it feels safer, somehow. So I wanted him to get in Mr. Graves, the Vicar. Such a nice man, and so kind to children. I always tell Godfrey he may not be the salt of the earth, but he's certainly its sugar. However, Godfrey seems to have quarrelled with him, so we're asking in the Abbé Bréhault instead."

Mr. Graves, the Vicar, certainly deserved the tribute Mrs. Varley had bestowed, but he had been dogged by that curious fate which generally sees to it that the country clergy are on bad terms with their rich neighbours. Minshull was not at present a churchgoer ; it was his principle that if the first impression you made in going to a place was one of impiety, every later recognition given to religion would be counted to you for justice. But he had come across the Vicar already in the matter of Sunday football, which he openly encouraged on his grounds, and as the result of a single interview had declared, with characteristic intolerance, that he would never have the man in his house again. Warbury is a straggling village, and though at first it seems to be nothing more than a cluster of old grey houses round a village church, a village inn, and a village elm, it branches out into curious side streets.

In one of these, by some territorial accident, there was a damp little Catholic church which served a parish of fifteen miles' radius. The priest of this church, in whom Minshull recognized something of a fellow-eccentric, was a frequent visitor at the Manor ; he was on holiday at the moment, and his place was being taken by a French seminary professor, who welcomed the chance of improving his English with board and lodging provided. It was he, then, who was to meet the guests at dinner in deference to Mrs. Varley's scruples, for the averruncation of all sinister influences.

There was a tiny puff of smoke down in the valley, and a faint but triumphant hoot announced that the afternoon train had once more braved the perils of its long crawl and won through. It was the signal for Mrs. Varley to make the tea ; the guests would be there in less than a quarter of an hour. The intense nervousness of the scholar began to close in on Shurmur, and he found himself mentally rehearsing the introductions that would soon have to be gone through ; let's see, ladies came first, and Miss Rostead would not need to be introduced at all. Should he introduce Mr. Scoop ? That would be silly, because, like his hostess, he only knew Mr. Scoop by a process of exhaustion. Or would Mrs. Haltwhistle do it ? He always went through this sort of purgatory before introducing people, and his meditations never had the slightest effect on his subsequent action. When the butler (he had forgotten this) announced the names of the visitors, he said vaguely, " Do you know Mrs. — what I mean to say is, Mrs. Haltwhistle ? " and then left the party to disentangle themselves.

Mrs. Haltwhistle was in black so deep as to give you the impression of mourning, until you remembered that Mrs. Haltwhistle did not approve of mourning. Looked at more closely, it seemed to have something of a sacerdotal air about it ; it was more like a habit than a dress. Miss Rostead, I need hardly say, was dressed in the height of fashion ; nor, naturally, will I particularize further, or I should give away the date at which my book is published, and prejudice the sale of the remainders. She was pretty in the style of her period, though she would have cut no ice as a Victorian ; her manner was one of studied naturalness which her elders customarily found painful. Mr. Scoop, who accompanied them, was short, round-faced, and insignificant ; it was only when he talked that you discovered he was an incessant platform lecturer. When he shook hands with Minshull he had the air of a confident medical man assuring a patient that he would soon put an end to *his* trouble.

Mrs. Haltwhistle boasted that she was particularly sensitive to atmospheres ; but she did not start well so far as her host and hostess were concerned. She shut her eyes and threw her head back as if she were getting a scent, and then opened the conversation with " What a psychic house you have, Mr. Minshull ! Now, what have these old walls to tell me ? "

(" Tell you to shut up, silly woman, silly woman," said Shurmur to himself.)

" I'm a little deaf in this ear," said Mrs. Varley. " So much better to be honest about it, don't you think ? I hope you aren't going to tell me there are ghosts about ? The servants always want to leave."

"I don't think they'd frighten your butler much," said Miss Rostead to Minshull. "He's a comic all right."

"He was," admitted Minshull. "When I first met him, he was running a travelling Punch-and-Judy show, and some confounded interfering women were objecting to the way he was treating his dog Toby. Why can't they have a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Men? They brought him into court about it, and got him fined; so I paid his fine for him, got to know him, and took him into my service afterwards, because his show was doing badly."

Storm gathered on Mrs. Haltwhistle's brow; she was the well-known protectress of every sort of animal, and spent long afternoons plotting for the success of the Dumb Friends' League. Miss Rostead hastily changed the subject: "What a railway!" she said. "We should have been here an hour ago if my unnatural male parent hadn't refused to let me have the car. There was trouble about a lamp-post which tried to run into me the other day. Do you motor much, Mrs. Varley?"

"I have to sometimes," said Mrs. Varley. "It's extraordinary the way people won't let you stay where you are nowadays. Mrs. Haltwhistle, you aren't eating anything. Do you know this part of the country at all, Mr. Scoop?"

"I know Cheltenham pretty well. We've had some very good meetings there. It's extraordinary, going up and down the country as I have to, the difference you find between one locality and another. The Midland towns, you know the big manufacturing towns,

are full of interest and the spirit of inquiry. But Cheltenham, now, Cheltenham was wonderful."

"Not much else to look forward to, I suppose," suggested Minshull. "They all live in Bath chairs there anyhow."

Mr. Scoop was too well accustomed to interruptions in public to mind them in conversation. "The enemy we find we have to fight with," he said, "is materialism. People all up and down the country who haven't and don't want to have any outlook beyond the grave. It is the fault of the churches very largely; they have given them bread instead of stones—I should say, stones instead of bread. Their minds are full of quack remedies for social disorders, they listen to any hare-brained fanatic who preaches revolutionary doctrines to them, and what is the result? An age of materialism; everybody thinking of himself, anxious to get on, no ideals anywhere. That's what we've got to fight. And mark you, we are breaking down the barriers. I assure you I get a most respectful hearing now wherever I go, and some very intelligent questions. Oh yes, things are moving, especially in the provinces. We are on the eve, take my word for it, on the eve of a great change in the whole outlook of people's minds about a future life; and we shall live to see it."

"What was that you were saying, Mr. Scoop?" asked Mrs. Varley. "I didn't quite catch."

"Mr. Scoop was saying," interrupted Mrs. Halt-whistle, "how very encouraging he finds his work."

"Oh! And what's his work?" asked the widow.

"He goes round lecturing," explained Mrs. Halt-whistle.

" What, lecturing about ghosts ? "

" She's too sweet, isn't she ? " whispered Miss Rostead to Shurmur.

Minshull, who had grounds for fearing that the lecture would start again unless action were taken, suggested that people would like to be shown to their rooms, and before long he found himself alone with Shurmur, who was wandering up and down looking at the strange knobs, buttons and bulbs that had already triumphed over distance, and were now to triumph, if their errand proved successful, over the separation of death itself.

" When are we going to start, Minshull ? " he asked.

" The sooner the better, I think. Honoria's got her back arched already, and Scoop promises to be a nightmare. What I thought of doing is this : it's no good trying to get in touch with—with this spook business until I've convinced you that my new instrument does what I say it does. I want you to listen-in, in the ordinary way, first of all, to the evening programme—the bed-time story, I take it, would not thrill you much—and see the difference which my apparatus makes to the effect produced by ordinary human speech, or by ordinary music. We can do that after dinner, and then to-morrow we can try and see what's doing down below."

" How do you mean—try ? Can't you be certain of getting on when you want to ? "

" Of course not. In the first place, I don't know yet what their times are, if they have fixed times, for sending messages, if they are sending messages. In the second place, I'm not always certain of getting their

wave-length ; it isn't a thing you can just switch on to like Daventry."

" I don't like that Scoop," commented Shurmur irrelevantly.

" Oh, capital chap, Scoop, we shall get on famously. He will be broadcasting to the spirits before long. Extraordinary the way people go to lectures. I don't mean your pupils, Shurmur, they've got to ; but these people who live in watering-places. I say, you make me very nervous, poking round the apparatus like that ; do look at the books instead—classics over there. Oh, hullo, Mrs. Haltwhistle ! I hope your room's all right for you ? "

" Perfect, thank you ; it has a mauve atmosphere, and that is so restful. It was very kind of you to ask my niece, Mr. Minshull ; but of course, I expect you know, she is not quite of *our* way of thinking." (She obviously assumed that Minshull was a convinced Spiritualist himself.) " She is so young and thoughtless ; you must try to take her in hand."

" Well, after all, we're only here to experiment. If the thing comes off, she's bound to be a bit impressed, eh ? Proof of the pudding's in the eating ; that's the way I look at it."

" How true that is, and how perfectly put ! But dear Kitty is like so many of her generation ; she does not seem to have the appetite for Truth. We must share our puddings with her, Mr. Minshull."

" Oo, I say, Godfrey ! " Miss Rostead glided in importantly through the open door. " I've been looking at the dining-room ; was that greedy of me ? "

(" Curse that hussy ! " said Shurmur to himself ;

" she'll spoil the whole thing." He himself had known Minshull nearly fifty years without ever calling him Godfrey. He fled for spiritual consolation to Ovid's *De Medicamine Faciei,* remote in his corner.)

" No, no," protested Minshull. " Go round the larder if you like. Does the dining-room look all right ? "

" Yes, but there's an extra place laid. Was I expected to bring my dancing partner ? Or is there a sort of Banquo-ghost that insists on having a place laid for him ? "

Minshull explained the Abbé, and the fact that he was expected.

" Oh, what fun," said Miss Rostead vaguely. " But I thought Catholics weren't allowed to go to *séances* : I know Bobby Evesham told me so."

" But this isn't a *séance,* you see ; it's only a sort of listening-in," said Minshull. " We don't have to sit in the dark and lift tables or anything. We just listen to the wireless, and if the spirits choose to chip in, that's not the Abbé's fault."

Miss Rostead was plainly disconcerted. " What ! You mean we're not going to hold a *séance* at all ! Oh, but that *is* a bore ; I think *séances* are such fun." Mrs. Haltwhistle shuddered. Her niece's interest in Spiritualism certainly seemed to be of a rather low order : as Minshull said afterwards to Shurmur, if she merely enjoyed sitting about in the dark, why couldn't she go to the pictures ?

" But, Kitty dear," objected Mrs. Haltwhistle, very seriously, " don't you see how important all this is, just because it's not a *séance* ? As long as we go on

meeting in darkened rooms, and there's nobody there except people who are more or less in sympathy with us, it's always possible for people to say that we are hysterical, or something of that kind; that whatever happens happens only in our minds and for our minds, with nothing *real* at the back of it all. But if we can sit there in broad daylight and listen-in to what the spirits are saying to one another, or perhaps even to us, with a man like this Abbé Bréhault, who is professionally prejudiced against the truth, sitting there and corroborating our evidence—think how much easier it will be to *prove* our case! Isn't this the answer to all the objections which stupid people make to our proceedings? That's how Mr. Scoop looks at it; he was telling me so while you were asleep in the train."

"My dear Con," said Miss Rostead (who never accorded her aunt any title of dignity), "*how* old-fashioned you are! Don't you see that the reason why most people take any interest in Spiritualism at all is simply because it's all so delightfully uncertain, and the setting of it is so thrilling? You wouldn't like the spirits to make themselves cheap by calling round in the morning like the man who comes to wind the clocks? The reason why I like the whole thing is because it's a *most* delicious experience to see things jumping about on the table when nobody's touching them. But wireless! Why, it would be as dull as listening to Scoopy lecturing! I think it would be a *most* awful mistake if we could *prove* the existence of the spirits; you would lose all the fun of wondering whether they were there or not. Spiritualism will simply

commit suicide if it ever proves its case; it will be just as respectable as all the other religions, and just as dull."

This unusual point of view plainly disconcerted Mrs. Haltwhistle. But the argument was interrupted by the reappearance of Mrs. Varley, who kept the conversation general until they had to go and dress for dinner. It was quite time, it seemed to Shurmur, that the party got to business; he could never be at his ease (not that Shurmur ever was at his ease) among a company so strangely assorted.

CHAPTER IV

DINNER AND AFTER DINNER

THE arrival of the French priest was somehow a trifle disappointing. He had been expected to come with bell, book and candle, an impressive figure in a sweeping soutane, insolent and overbearing towards the company until such time as the march of science should dispel his obstinate illusions. Instead, he proved to be a small man, slightly built and somewhat apologetic in manner; his face deeply lined, full of sympathy and expression as the faces of French priests so often are, but cheerful, unassuming, remote from all suspicion of dogmatism. When he came over, he had instructed an incompetent tailor to build him a clerical suit as clerical suits were worn in England; and the honest man, wondering mildly at this devil of a country where the *curés* did not wear soutanes, had turned out a hybrid sort of costume which would have attracted attention even at a Church Congress. He was, besides, though thoroughly conversant with English even as a spoken language, in the experimental stage of pronouncing it, that "vehry-plis-to-mit-you" stage which is so attractive and so disarming. It would have been

difficult to conceive a less formidable champion for the ranks of clericalism ; he was so attentive to what was said, so respectful, so hesitating in his replies.

At dinner, however, he found himself put down next to Mrs. Haltwhistle, and Mrs. Haltwhistle was wholly incapable of avoiding shop, or even controversy. By way of putting the poor man at his ease in the very soup course, she began :

" It always seems so strange to me, M. l'Abbé, that your Church refuses to take any notice of Spiritualism. You want, above all things, to persuade people that there is a life beyond the grave ; and when people ask you for proof, you have nothing to show them. Wouldn't it be better if you could say ' You have only to put it to the test. If you don't believe in a future life, you have only to ask, say, Cardinal Newman, and he will give you proof that he is still alive and understands all about it ? ' It always seems to me that you're wasting such an opportunity. Of course, I know, your superiors are very strict with you about such things."

" I think the same as what you say ; I think it would be a very good thing if they could speak to Cardinal Newman ; but, you see, I do not know if Cardinal Newman will be very pleased to speak with them."

" But surely it is very unscientific to doubt that all the messages which we get from the other side really come from the people who profess to send them ? I myself have been present when we got some really wonderful messages from Cardinal Newman ; exactly in his own style, you know, and all that kind of thing."

" And yet this is also very extraordinary, Madame, that these wonderful messages all come to nothing! Look now, here is Cardinal Newman, very great man, very great author. All his life he writes spiritual books, always he wants to help people who are in doubt, to make people lead better lives. He has published I do not know how many volumes. Then he dies, and surely when he is dead he comes to know more about the truth. So you ask him what he thinks, and he sends you these wonderful messages—tell me, has anyone published those messages? Would anyone buy those messages if they were published? You know well that if they are written down on paper they are only what you might read every day in the newspapers. Tell me, Madame, if you have been corresponding all this long time with the dead, how is it that the dead have said nothing that is worth saying? That Shakespeare has written no more poetry; that Darwin has told us nothing about science which before we did not know? "

" That's a fair question, you know," put in Minshull. " My difficulty about Spiritualism, Mrs. Haltwhistle, is that it's never given us a Derby winner yet. If only you could manage that, now! "

" Yes, that's all very well," said Shurmur abruptly, " but, you see, not direct contact, nobody pretends it's direct contact. The controls, I mean. Don't know anything about it. Don't suppose anybody does. But what I mean is, it's not direct contact."

" Oh, one's prepared to allow for a little jamming, of course. But hang it all, just to spell out the name of a Derby winner! "

"Surely," said Mrs. Haltwhistle sweetly, "that's because over there they don't care about such trivial things?"

"Don't know about that, don't know about that," corrected Shurmur. "But, what I say is, there's something in between, agencies in between, you see, and you can't trust 'em."

"But precisely," said the Abbé, shrugging his shoulders, with outstretched hands. "There is all the while something in between; and how do we know what is on the other side of the thing in between? If Newman said to me with his own voice, 'Come then, mon brave Bréhault, let me tell you a little what things are like here,' then perhaps I would attend. But these controls, these little devils of imps, how am I to believe them? If your servant says, 'Madame is from home,' it may be (is it not so?) that madame is at home all the same. Why then am I to believe these imps when they say to me that Newman is here?"

Mr. Scoop had been longing for some time to break into the conversation, but he was a child in the hands of Mrs. Varley, who found a malicious pleasure in monopolizing him. At this point, taking advantage of a moment when she was helping herself to fish, he hastened to intervene. "But there is proof, sir, proof of the identity. After all, how do we judge identity in this world? A man's face, a man's handwriting, a few merely external impressions of him make up, for us, the man. But what is the man himself? What but the ego which experiences, and retains the impression of what it has experienced in

memory? If a friend sends a letter to me on a typewriter, the only way in which I can be certain that the correspondence is genuine is to ask myself, 'Does this message betray a knowledge of my friend's circumstances and my own which a forger would have found it impossible to counterfeit?' Now, these messages which we receive from the spirits are like typewritten letters; we do not profess, in the ordinary way at any rate, to have achieved direct contact. We test them, then, by the knowledge which they betray. And it is on record, for anybody who has the candour to read our literature, that a message from a spirit will reveal, say, the existence of a document, or some fact from the past, which cannot have been known except to the person who has crossed over. Now, how are we going to explain knowledge like that except by supposing that conscious identity persists beyond the grave?"

Miss Rostead yawned. It was a lady-like yawn, but quite unmistakable. "That's all very well, Scoop," she said (she always enjoyed omitting the "Mr."), "but how about the Unc? Do you read Freud? You should; it's the *most* fascinating stuff. Well, the point about the Unc——"

"What *is* the Unk?" asked Shurmur.

"Oh, the unconsciousness—what the Edwardians called the sub-consciousness. It remembers things which consciousness can't remember—it even remembers things which consciousness has never sat up and taken notice of at all. So that a man under a drug, you see, might quote word for word a piece of Basque poetry which he'd once heard sung under

his window. I don't see why that shouldn't explain the odd things the spirits do—talking in a foreign language, for example, which nobody at the table understands."

"But that," objected Minshull, "wouldn't account for the spirits mentioning things which nobody in the world knew, secrets which only the dead person *could* know."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Haltwhistle. "You agree, Mr. Minshull, that only life after death can account for that?"

"No, I don't. I look at it from what you might call the wireless point of view. If the vibrations set up by a noise go on, in theory, indefinitely, how do we know that there aren't waves of thought which echo on after the thinker has died? For all I know, your mediums may simply succeed in picking up these floating messages from a remote past. I don't say that's probable, I only say it's possible, and your case remains unproved."

"For myself," said the Abbé, "I do not like these imps. Who will tell me what they know and what they do not know?"

"It surprises me, sir," replied Scoop, "that you should join in; has not your Church, too, suffered from human incredulity? It is a law of all spiritual progress that any fresh revelation should be greeted by an outburst of desperate unbelief, of scepticism at all costs. Here are we trying to rid mankind of its greatest enemy, the fear of death; and what is mankind's answer? It takes refuge in the most far-fetched explanations rather than admit the super-

natural truth. Any theory will do, to keep mankind in its chains."

"Afraid of death?" said Mrs. Varley, sitting up suddenly. "And a very good thing too. Mystery's good for all of us, depend upon it; and there are two mysteries we were never meant to solve, marriage and death. You get rid of those, and life goes flat like stale champagne. A man's not a man if death has no terrors for him."

"I don't think I'm afraid of death a bit," said Miss Rostead.

"That's just want of imagination, my dear. Wait till you're a little older, and you'll see."

"You're getting mixed up, Honoria," said Minshull. "You can take away the mystery of death without taking away the fear of it. Spiritualism doesn't make people braver about dying. You may call it passing over, but nobody wants to pass over, all the same."

"But don't you think," urged Mrs. Haltwhistle, with the air of saying something tremendously new, "that there are two quite different things, the fear of dying and the fear of being dead? And it's the fear of being dead that the new Truth takes away from us. We aren't crippled in our poor human activities by the feeling that it must all come to an end so terribly soon. We know now that death is not an end, only the beginning of a new chapter. And I think that's so uplifting, don't you? To think, for example, that after I have left this material world I shall still be able to go on with my work for the Dumb Friends' League!"

"Is that what you call this Spiritualist Church of

yours," asked the Abbé in perfectly good faith, "the Damned Friends' League?"

"Yes, that's the point, that's the point," said Shurmur, fortunately ignoring the interruption; "do we still go on taking an interest in the same things? Does a scholar, for example, keep up his scholarship? What I mean to say is, does he still take an interest in fresh discoveries, you know?" He blushed at finding that he was betraying his own nightmares so easily.

"And that, surely, is where Spiritualism helps us," added Scoop triumphantly. "It's easy to see, from their utterances, that the spirits have still the same characteristic interests there as here. Life beyond the grave is clearly something continuous with ours."

"You will pardon me," said the Abbé, "but that is just what makes me suspicious. Always the spirits say just the sort of thing you would expect them to say. You have messages from Oscar Wilde, and he makes epigrams. But I ask myself, 'Is this Wilde not tired yet of making epigrams?' They say always what you expect them to say; if they would only say something surprising, then perhaps we should feel more sure that it is not your minds always which are at work."

"What I want to know," said Mrs. Varley suddenly, "is what's the good of sitting here arguing like this, when we haven't tested Godfrey's experiment yet? If the experiment comes off, then you people who believe in ghosts will have a quite fresh line of proof, eh? And perhaps you'll be able to convince us all."

"Not the Abbé, I think," said Mr. Scoop maliciously.

"He would not believe though one rose from the dead."

"No, it is not like that," explained the Abbé. "At present, if you take me to a *séance*, I do not admit that there is anything real; I say to myself, 'Perhaps I have been deceived, perhaps these other good people have been deceived, the room was so dark, we were so excited.' But if you make me hear something new by the radio in broad daylight, then I am not afraid of having been deceived; then I will say to myself, 'There is here something real, yes. Only I do not know what that real thing is.'"

"But you admit, surely, that the evidence points towards our conclusion?" persisted Scoop.

"No, that I do not admit, because the evidence never points in any direction unless you are already looking there. The evidence is only the policeman, who corrects your theories, who tells you, That way there is no road."

There was a ring at the front-door bell; there were little colloquies outside, and then the butler came in to tell the Abbé that he was wanted for a sick call. "It will not take long; I will return, if you will excuse me; no, pray keep nothing, I have dined already enough;" the result was a gap in the company for the time being, and equally a gap in the conversation. To Spiritualist and sceptic alike the old, gross fact of bodily death intruded itself as an embarrassment and a nameless thing. Mrs. Haltwhistle herself was slave enough to conventionality to pull a long face over the "crossing over" in some neighbouring cottage, of a person she had never seen and would never hear of.

It was enough that somebody somewhere, with labouring breath, was facing the great ordeal which we make light of only in the abstract. Their voices were hushed a little, their conversation desultory; you would have thought that even the lamps over the table had lost a shade of their brilliance.

To Mr. Scoop, however, this was an opportunity for saying something which he had long wanted to say, but had feared to find no opportunity. "You know best, of course, Mr. Minshull, but are you sure that it wouldn't be better to get on to the experiment while the good Abbé is away? One doesn't want, naturally, to be narrow-minded, but there is no doubt that his is a hostile influence. And it does seem, somehow—that is our experience—that such hostile influences inhibit the manifestations altogether, or at least materially affect the ease with which they are produced."

"Eh? What's that?" said Mrs. Varley. "Want to raise ghosts while the clergyman's back is turned? I won't have it. If we are to have skeletons in armour marching into the room, I must have my mascot with me." It was evident that Mrs. Varley herself was a hostile influence before which any manifestation might be excused for feeling inhibited.

"My dear Honoria," said Minshull, "you're right off the point. So are you, Mr. Scoop, if you don't mind my saying so. What we're going to try this evening is a mere wireless experiment; I want you all to get the measure of my apparatus, and to judge of its effects in ordinary life. What we shall be listening to is plain honest 2 LO; and the presence of a

minister of religion can be neither a necessity nor an obstacle. Of course we'll wait till the Abbé comes back—for that matter, they are in a very dull part of the programme just now." And, to Shurmur's relief (for he was a man who valued his glass of port), the interrupted banquet was decently resumed.

Yet Shurmur had hardly time to fondle his port with all the leisureliness that is born of long residence in an old-fashioned common-room. Mr. Scoop was clearly anxious to get on with business as soon as possible, and Minshull was tormented by the thought of what Kitty Rostead might be saying to his sister, and what his sister might be saying to Kitty Rostead. The return of the Abbé, as cool and unemotional as if he had been out to prescribe for a case of hay fever, was the signal for their adjournment to the upstairs room, where you could hear the wind spending its baffled force against the thick outer walls, and the firelight played caressingly on the stained panels in the windows. Mrs. Varley kept close to the chimney-corner, looking as if she had mislaid her spinning-wheel; Miss Rostead sat well forward with her knees crossed, frowning over a cigarette (an attitude she had copied from an undergraduate); Mrs. Haltwhistle was listening to the conversation of her hostess with rapt eyes, trying to put her in a good temper for the sake of the evening's performance.

A little time passed, as time will pass, before the company was properly settled; before Miss Rostead had replenished her cigarette-case from upstairs, and Shurmur had been torn away from a passage which interested him in *De Medicamine Faciei.* At last,

however, the mysterious box of the higher broadcasting was produced and set on the table, all the guests turning slightly towards it as if determined to expose any attempt at imposture. The wind outside seemed to be increasing in violence, and Minshull carefully pulled all the curtains over the windows to deaden the sound of it. Nothing was audible now except the crackling of the fire and a faint tinkle-tinkle-crash-crash from downstairs which showed that the servants were clearing away in the dining-room.

"I think we might ask them to do that later on," suggested Minshull; "Honoria, would you mind ringing the bell? They'll know what it's for."

And sure enough, as soon as the bell had pealed, the sounds from downstairs were suddenly interrupted; a door shut softly somewhere, and all was still.

"I've only one pair of head-phones," said Minshull, "but I should like somebody to use them, if only because one catches the exact quality of the sounds more nicely through them than with the loud speaker. Mr. Scoop, I think perhaps, if you don't mind, it would be a good thing for you to try them. Thank you." Mr. Scoop looked more professional than ever with the phones strapped round his head; you expected somebody to say "Ninety-nine" in a hoarse voice, for his diagnosis.

But it was no hoarse voice, it was the usual unnecessarily rich tones of the announcer that greeted them suddenly, as Minshull, with a few deft turns of the wrist, put them in communication with 2 LO.

"... in the South Eastern counties." It was clear that the British public was being treated to one of those weather forecasts, which, discredited long since in the cold print of the newspapers, still pass for white magic when heard by wireless. "In the Midlands, fair generally, with strong winds, occasional showers, and mist locally. In the Northern counties, cloudy with bursts of sunshine, rain locally, mild with occasional cold winds." The company listened to these inspired utterances with that sufficient but inefficacious faith with which a British audience receives all weather reports. "Better wait till he gets on to the news bulletin," said Minshull. "It's easier to notice the change of tone." In due time the news bulletin began:

"Serious strikes in Serbia. The operatives of several factories in the Skupshup district have downed tools as a protest against the proposed reduction of wages. Efforts are being made by the Government to induce the employers and the men to meet on a friendly footing. Rioting is reported from one or two centres, but the police have the situation well in hand. Plucky waterman saves life at Chiswick. This morning, at a quarter past ten, shouts for help were heard from the Embankment close to Ponder's Row, Chiswick. James Bates, a waterman, whose attention was called to the cries by a bystander, jumped into the water, and rescued Susie, the five-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes, of 17 Sunbury Place, Chiswick. The little one is believed to have fallen into the water accidentally while playing. The Prince of Wales in Labrador. Upwards of three hundred residents——"

"I think that'll do just to give you the tone of voice," said Minshull grimly. "I'm afraid I can't get my apparatus going at present without switching off; that's merely a mechanical matter, of course, but it's still rather clumsy in the working." He bent down before a cabinet in the corner of the room, and with some slight effort, it seemed (for he gasped occasionally), put his apparatus into working order. "Now, the news bulletin will still be unfolding its thrilling revelations," he said. "It's one man that does it all. Listen, please, to the pitch of his voice."

It is to be presumed that the reader has at some time experienced, whether accidentally or of set purpose, the effect of letting a gramophone run down while it is still playing its tune. He will remember how the gradual slowing down of the machinery, quite apart from altering the time of the piece, lowers the note to an unrecognizable gurgle. "Land of Hope and Glory" is a suitable air on which to try the experiment. The instantaneous effect of Minshull's apparatus was something of the same kind. Mysteriously, it retarded the time, and of course there was a corresponding alteration of note. It was clearly not that the announcer was speaking more softly; there was no mistaking the fact that he was giving the world the full benefit of his news bulletin. Nor could it be suggested that the wireless installation was at fault in any way; the sound came as clear and as crisp as ever. But the voice was of a low pitch such as no ordinary human being ever uses, and the effect, had not the party been so eagerly interested, was indescribably comic:

" . . . the commercial stability of the country. The announcement was greeted with loud cheers. More overcrowding in London. Two young orang-outangs have just arrived at the Zoological Society's gardens, after journeying by sea all the way from Sumatra. We are glad to be able to state that they are not overcome in any way by the fatigues of the journey. Daring shop robbery in Peckham. The premises of Messrs Levy and Barrowglass of High Street, Peckham, were yesterday the scene of an audacious raid by a gang of shop-lifters. Two of the gang were detaining the assistants in conversation when their confederates suddenly entered the shop, swept away armfuls of jewellery, and ran back, followed closely by their fellow-miscreants, to a motor-car which was in readiness outside. The whole party drove off at full speed, and up to the time of this announcement no clue has been found as to their whereabouts. Mr. Levy informed the police that many of the valuables missing were almost irreplaceable. Energetic nonagenarian. Mr. William Humphreys, of Bletchworth, Huntingdonshire, who celebrated his 91st birthday yesterday, has for the last twenty years walked five miles a day in all weathers. He has twenty-five grandchildren. French honour for heroic lady doctor. Miss Alice Hemmerdine . . ."

Minshull switched off again. " That's about as much as I can stand," he explained, " but you see what I mean, don't you ? "

" That's awfully exciting, Godfrey," said Miss Rostead. " Will you patent this thing and get lots of money for it ? I don't quite see what good it's

going to do, but it's *most* attractive. I never heard Uncle Caractacus sound so well."

"I must congratulate you, sir," said Mr. Scoop. "Of course it's all off my beat, this part of it; but your proof is as clear as crystal. May we hear some of the musical programme in the same way?"

"Certainly. It will be safe in a minute or two. Let's see, what follows this? Where did I put that horrible rag?" He picked up a technical organ of the science, and smoothed it out to find the evening's programme. "Miss Ada Travers will sing Annie Laurie. That should be good enough. Shall we have the first verse Miss Travers unaided, and keep my apparatus for the second? Right." He re-connected, and at a fortunate moment. "Miss Ada Travers will now sing Annie Laurie. Annie Laurie will be sung by Miss Ada Travers. Miss Travers will now sing to you." And after a few tinkling notes on the piano Miss Travers obliged, in a fine soprano voice. You could still recognize it as a fine voice in the second verse, but in the second verse it had slowed down the time, and the soprano had changed to a curious sort of contralto. There was no doubt that Minshull's apparatus had scored again.

"There's just one more test which I've never tried. It's getting on for eleven now, when they give you the time by Big Ben. I want to see what effect this gadget of mine has on Big Ben, if you don't mind."

The minutes crawled on, while the company exchanged their comments on the experience; the

apparatus was set going; the announcer was heard to say, in his new-found growl, "Are you ready? Stand ready for eleven o'clock by Big Ben . . ."

This was followed by complete silence.

CHAPTER V

THE EAVESDROPPERS

THE next morning was a morning of mist. Not that dull curtain of grey which we call fog; a soft, white, clinging mist that stole up to your windows and in at your windows, as if beckoning you, with fantastically wreathed fingers, to rise. No darkness came with it; rather, it seemed to diffuse the light with an even, sober radiance. Out of doors, it transfigured the shapes of tree and gable and chimney-stack with the snowy vagueness of a Japanese drawing. But it was not one of those summer mists which rise and are dissipated with full morning, as if a giant were gradually stealing away the world's bed-clothes. It hung there resolutely, wrapping the face of things from sight. To the visitors who had only arrived with nightfall, it might have seemed as if this strange old house had no view at all from its windows, no world to look out on, isolated in some remote corner of unsubstantial space. From each terrace of the garden you felt that there was no next terrace, only a white sea of cloud that stretched interminably. Mrs. Haltwhistle, who never did anything so gross and material as to breakfast

downstairs, found that it affected her, when her morning began, with a feeling of eerie desolation; it was as if she and her fellow-guests had been trapped into some enchanted castle, and the spirits they had come to evoke were besieging it on all sides, pointing the way silently to one another behind a barrage of cloud.

And indeed, just for a second she did experience a shock. As she stood looking out at one of the garden doors, it did look to her for a moment as if a black giant were wading up to her out of the mist—Orion, you would think, knee-deep in the waves. The next instant the focus of the apparition readjusted itself, and she saw that it was only the little French priest, coming up through some garden gate to ask after the progress of the experiment.

"Good morning, madame," he said; "is it to-day that we mean to raise the ghosts? It looks" (he pointed down the garden path) "as if on such a day they would not have far to come."

"Don't, M. l'Abbé!" she shuddered. "Of course, I'm not afraid of the spirits, because I know that they are not hostile to us in any way. It is impossible, you see, to be superstitious and a Spiritualist. But these grey days arouse some of one's primitive instinct —the instinct that fears the unknown."

"For myself, I do not fear the spirits, but I fear—what shall I say?—their lift-boys."

"I wonder if you would mind my saying something? I do wish you'd be careful how you talk about the spirits in front of Mr. Scoop. You see, it means so much to him. Poor man, he has suffered a great deal."

Mrs. Haltwhistle always said this about everybody except her husband. The Abbé wrinkled his brows in obvious distress. "I am very sorry if I hurt his feelings. But we also have a respect for the dead; and to us, do you see? it is not at all pleasant to hear people speak of Cardinal Newman as if he were at the other end of a telephone. You think we do not believe that our dead are still alive, because we do not wish to talk to them. Only that is not so. We do not wish to talk to them because we do not wish to intrude on a very great secret which is too sacred for us. But I offend Mr. Scoop?"

"Oh no, I wouldn't say *that* exactly, only I think perhaps—perhaps if you wouldn't mind talking in *French* when you want to speak out your mind about it all. Because Mr. Scoop doesn't understand French very well; but I shall understand—I shall understand *perfectly*." And she beamed upon him with a quite intolerable tolerance.

"Certainly madame, certainly; unless my opinion is asked for, I will think aloud a little, if I may, in my own French; and Mr. Scoop will believe perhaps that I am saying my prayers. Is Mr. Minshull making ready his instruments?"

"Yes, he's upstairs now. He can't tell, he says, when he may be able to pick up a fragment of these strange sounds here and there. But perhaps it would be better if we went up, because the thing may come at any moment."

"Ah, there you are," said Mrs. Varley, meeting them as they came upstairs. "Godfrey's all over the floor, looking as if he were trying to get a tame rabbit

out of its cage. I do hope you're not shocked with us, M. l'Abbé, for going on like this. Go and talk to Mr. Shurmur over there ; he's trying to hide behind an Ovid for fear of having to say ' Good-morning ' to me. I hope Miss Rostead's joining us ? "

" I left her just doing her hair," said Mrs. Halt-whistle.

" I suppose she has to go on doing that, even when there's none of it left to do. But it's always the way —Mr. Shurmur, I'm sure you've noticed how these young ladies who are shingled still keep on stroking the backs of their heads, just from habit ? "

" What, stroke the backs of their heads ? Why not ? I do it myself," said Shurmur, hardly looking up from his book.

" Stroke the backs of young ladies' heads ? Really, Mr. Shurmur, you ought to be ashamed of yourself ! No, no, I won't have any explanations. Ah ! Good-morning, Miss Rostead : you must excuse my brother not taking any notice of you, but he seems to be upside down at the moment. Haven't you got that thing to work yet, Godfrey ? "

Minshull turned an agonized, phone-framed face from the centre of his operations. " I thought I caught something then ; I'll just get the loud speaker going. There's such a confounded lot of Morse going about that it's difficult to know where you are, but I think I've got the wave-length about right." He put the head-phones on to Shurmur from behind, causing him to stroke his head in some alarm, and then returned to his wallowing. " You ought to get anything that's going now, all of you," he added.

"But you'd better keep fairly quiet, because the sounds are pretty hard to catch. Confound it, I'd forgotten that note!" He pressed a bell, and when the comic butler appeared, despatched a note to the village schoolmaster. Also, would he let Mr. Scoop know that the apparatus was now quite ready?

For a while the party sat, silent as a Quaker meeting, all eyes glued on the magic box, with the old human misconception that sound is visible. But their attention was not instantly rewarded, and though Shurmur pointed to a false scent every now and then as he heard "drumming noises," he was told that these were due to Morse and could safely be disregarded. Soon they found themselves conversing, but in low tones as in a room where telephone calls are expected.

"I wonder," said Miss Rostead, "why the spirits should talk to one another in squeaky voices like that?"

"They did in Homer," suggested Shurmur. "Squeaked like bats. Not that it's Homer really, I suppose, the twenty-fourth Odyssey, but it gives you the belief of a period, probably, well before 700 B.C. Virgil seems to have had the same idea—their 'piping voice,' I mean to say, and 'the attempted cry their gaping throats eludes.' Not that one attaches much importance to what they said."

"I don't know so much about that," put in Mr. Scoop; "it's surprising how the more our knowledge of these things grows, the more respect we have for the judgment of the ancients. Their guesses—or are we perhaps to say something more than guesses?—often prove justified by the discoveries of psychic

science. To my mind it seems very probable that the world, for all the boasted advance of learning, has in certain very important respects gone back on its past—that there are lost sciences as well as lost arts——"

He stopped abruptly as Minshull, still crouching over his apparatus, upset a heavy book with a bang that made all their hearts leap. "Sorry," he said; "careless of me. The mist doesn't seem to be lifting yet, does it?" And indeed, the windows looked as if they had been lined with cotton-wool, so close the drifting wreaths clung to them. The wind of yesterday had ceased; there was no breath from without to disturb their conclave.

"Music!" cried Shurmur suddenly.

Music it was, if resonant tones are musical—infinitely distant, as it seemed, and struck by they knew not what instrument of percussion, dainty, tinkling notes, each so faint that it seemed the next must be lost to hearing altogether. Music it was, if music consists in the ordered sequence of notes, grouped in recurrent phrases, satisfying the mind at least with a sense of human purpose and the creative desire. Music it was, if the tinkling of running brooks is musical, or the cigala's chirp, or cow-bells on a Swiss hill-side, or the jangling of bits when cavalry are on the march; but such sounds as these are only weeds in the garden of music; whatever cadences they have are only fortuitous, never gratifying the ear by repetition; here was design and workmanship, with measured pauses and nicely calculated intervals.

Yet music it was not, if we in this sublunary hotch-

potch of a world have not merely imagined for ourselves laws of harmony, dinning them into our ears by long use, so that the breach of such laws must needs be condemned as discord. Music it was not, if, as the eye has a right to match colours and the palate to discern pontifically between rival flavours, so the ear too has its own judiciary province, and may tell us without fear of contradiction that this sequence of notes is music and that mere noise. Individually, each tiny sound was like a peep into memory; told of church-bells and bird-song and the roaring of distant seas. But the grouping of the sounds, at least for mortal auditors, was intolerable; never, surely, in barbaric temple or in primeval forest did such a congeries of notes masquerade in the sacred investiture of art.

The little Abbé was the only one among the eavesdroppers who found his voice when it was finished; but, true to his promise, he talked to himself in an undertone, and in French. "*Même ici le jazz*" was his irreverent comment. But there was a "Sh-h-h" from the others; though the music had ended, something else was happening. There had been no clatter of applause when the song died away, such as punctuates an earthly concert. But there were voices heard whispering; even more remote, it seemed, than the music itself, yet indisputably human voices. You called it whispering, because the sibilant consonants predominated; but the vowels were just audible, like the chirp of a cricket or the squeak of a mouse in the wainscotting. When these died away, and were replaced by complete silence once more, the company

found breath and began, in guarded tones, to exchange experiences.

"What heavenly music!" said Mrs. Haltwhistle. "*So* unlike ours, so utterly *different* from ours, and yet somehow it gives you the sense that all our music is wrong. Our music is a pathetic experiment; what we are trying to do is to recapture the notes of such music as that we have just heard, remembered from who knows what past existence! Handel, and Beethoven, and even Wagner, trying to find those lost cadences, yet somehow getting it all the wrong way round!"

"Perhaps I'm old-fashioned," said Mrs. Varley grimly, "but I confess that if that is the music of what you call 'the other side,' it does *not* attract me. Considering how largely music figures in some accounts of a future life, I had hoped for something more encouraging."

"You would get accustomed to it," explained Mr. Scoop. "How absurd it is of us to expect that, with our sense-bound minds, we should be able to understand and to appreciate all at once the conditions of a disembodied existence! Depend upon it, Mrs. Varley, the life beyond is, at first, mainly an educational process; we must receive a fresh training to equip us for a new and not less useful career."

"Well," said the old lady, "all I can say is, it seems to me a pity I should have had to learn my scales when I was a girl, and then have to forget about them when I go to join poor George."

"Have you ever heard anything like this before,

Godfrey ? " asked Miss Rostead. " When you were trying your own experiments, I mean ? "

" Never anything nearly so distinct," admitted Minshull gravely. " And you see what it means ? The conditions under which you heard those faint noises just now were the same conditions under which the voice of the B.B.C. announcer sank to a dull growl, and Big Ben was altogether beyond our compass of hearing. I put it to you, whether it would have been possible without my invention to hear these noises at all ? "

" And the whispers, too ! " added Mrs. Haltwhistle. " I suppose you caught what they were saying ? "

" Not a word," said Shurmur. " I just thought there were voices whispering, but that's all I could make out."

" Oh, but I heard it quite distinctly—bits of it. Somebody asked, *Were you happy ?* and the answer came *Yes* ; and then the question, *And are you still as happy ?* and the answer came *Yes* again."

" Strange ! " said the Abbé. " For me also there were voices, but no words."

" The only words *I* heard," put in Mr. Scoop, " were Italian."

" Italian ? What were they ? " asked Minshull with interest.

" *Ricorditi di me*—Remember. That's all I heard."

" And I," added Miss Rostead, " heard words, or thought I did. Only it must have been a language I don't know at all. I can just remember that a bit of it sounded rather like *To catch the nine-fifteen*—it wasn't that, of course, really ; but you know how

one does make up a bit of English rigmarole so as to commit a foreign phrase to memory."

"Dear Kitty!" said Mrs. Haltwhistle, pleased with her niece for once. "Well, we have all been very close to a wonderful experience. I don't know how I'm to thank you, Mr. Minshull, for the privilege of assisting at such an undertaking. A new door has opened for us into the darkness, and we have heard unspeakable words. What time do you have luncheon, Mr. Minshull?"

"I'd forgotten all about it. Ought to be ready now. Ah, here's Olyett!" The door opened after a discreet knock, and the comic butler came in to announce that luncheon was served. Minshull was about to disconnect, when Mr. Scoop interrupted him:

"Excuse me, but I don't think we ought to let the experiment stop here. Who knows at what moment the revelations may begin again? I am quite willing to remain here listening, while you go and have luncheon. I shall feel it a privilege to stand sentry upon the frontiers of the Unknown."

"Oh, that's uncommonly good of you, Mr. Scoop. By all means stand watch-dog, and we will have your luncheon kept hot for you." And the party trooped out of the room, leaving Mr. Scoop helmeted with the head-phones, and unconsciously assuming the air of the sentry at Pompeii.

"What I don't understand," said Miss Rostead, at the end of that half-minute's silence which reminds us that our ancestors used to say grace before meat, "is what we've been listening to. I mean, was it

a sort of public concert, and did we hear afterwards a few snatches of comment from a whole crowd of people who were present, or were those voices quite unconnected with the music?"

"Surely, Kitty," said Mrs. Haltwhistle, "it would be too soon to form any theories? But if you ask me what I think, I believe there's a fairly simple explanation to be found. Vale Owen's revelations definitely established the fact that the spirits are largely occupied in listening to concerts; and that there is one kind of concert which has, if you can call it so, a specially large public—what is called The Concert of the Towers. He spoke, I think, of four great towers as having something to do with it. Of course, I'd like Mr. Scoop's opinion, but it did seem to me as if those towers, which seemed at first sight to have so little to do with it, might really be a sort of wireless station, something like the big one one sees near Rugby. In that case, you see, the Concert of the Towers would be something corresponding to our own wireless concerts, and that may have been what we've been listening to, overhearing at the same time a little of the conversation from what corresponds to the audience."

"I read also in the papers," said the Abbé, "of this concert of the Towers, and I asked myself, Is not perhaps the sub-consciousness of this Vale Owen —I beg your pardon, Miss Rostead, the unconsciousness of this Vale Owen—remembering in a vague way something about the Concert of the Powers? For these things happened, you see, before the War. And this unconsciousness of ours, how often in dreams it

remembers something we have seen or heard, only remembers it just wrong ! "

" Really, M. l'Abbé," protested Mrs. Haltwhistle, " is this a suitable moment to cast doubt on the existence of the spirits, when we have just heard with our own ears the music which they listen to, and even caught the sound of their own voices ? I don't know whether there's anything in my idea about the Concert of the Towers, but surely we can't deny that there is music which mortal ears have never hitherto been properly attuned to, and that such music has an audience which is not of our own flesh and blood ? "

" But, Con dear," objected Miss Rostead, " it isn't all such easy going. If it was a wireless concert, it would have an audience, but the audience wouldn't be sitting round in the same building. They would be listening-in with the jolly old loud speaker, the same as we were. And I don't see in that case why we should overhear their conversation, unless of course transmitting licences are far commoner down there—I mean, over there—than they are here."

" Yes, but are spirits in space ? " asked Shurmur. " We don't know whether spirits are in space—our space, anyway. What I mean to say is, couldn't they perhaps all be listening to a concert without being actually present at it—listening-in from a distance, hey ? "

" And yet it would be very difficult for them to listen-in from a distance," suggested the priest, " if they are not in space at all."

" Oughtn't we perhaps to think of them," amended Mrs. Haltwhistle, " as all having what corresponds to

transmitting licences? So that every thought which their mind wishes to express vibrates in the ether as a natural consequence."

"I should have thought," suggested Minshull, "that that would have given rise to a good deal of what corresponds to jamming."

"And in that case," Miss Rostead pointed out, "there's no reason why the whispers we heard, or thought we heard, should have anything to do with the music at all. They may have been general conversation, and the music itself may have passed without comment."

"It wouldn't have passed without comment," said Mrs. Varley doggedly, "if *my* mind had been expressing itself."

"What I can't understand," said Shurmur, "is the language difficulty—difficulty of language. Did you say, Mrs. Haltwhistle, that you heard words spoken in English?"

"Yes, oh, quite distinctly! But, you see, that's no new difficulty, because we've plenty of evidence from the *séances* of spirits talking in English; and sometimes even with English dialects."

"Yes, but how? What I mean is, do the spirits all talk in their native languages, or do they all talk in English, or what?"

"*C'est sans doute le principe de la majorité*," murmured the Abbé to himself.

"Well, you know, it was explained to me the other day" (Mrs. Haltwhistle always used this formula when she alluded to her automatic writing) "that the spirits don't really speak, don't use any medium of

sound, but can just transfer their thoughts straight from one to another. So that perhaps their thoughts, when they become audible to us, clothe themselves in English because our minds are English."

"Is Scoop partly Italian?" asked Minshull. "He doesn't look it."

"No; I see what you mean. And of course Kitty heard a quite unknown language, which makes it more complicated still. It really seems as if the spirits must still *think* in their own native languages, just as we think in English, and that the impression which their thoughts make on the ether around them clothes itself in language accordingly."

"You will pardon me, madame," suggested the Abbé, "but if the spirits play on musical instruments which make a real sound, why do they not also use real speech? Or will you say that the music also was not real music, it was the thoughts of these spirits expressing itself by vibrations just of that kind? Of course it might be that the voices express their thoughts, and the music only their dreams."

"Their nightmares, you mean, Abbé," shouted Mrs. Varley from her end of the table.

"Really I don't know," said Mrs. Haltwhistle.

"We might ask Planchette about it," added her niece.

By this time luncheon was in its later stages, and Minshull suggested that Mr. Scoop should be relieved of his lonely watch. They betook themselves upstairs again, and found that his patience had been unrewarded; nor was there any hint of an interruption from the wireless while his meal was in progress. And indeed, time passed on, and their conversation

had become merely general, when quite suddenly a voice intervened that set them all staring at the sound-box in amazement.

It was a human voice certainly, or its exact analogue ; but it spoke with laborious slowness, and the utterance was shrill almost to squeaking ; there was something (but this might have been the fault of the wireless installation) a trifle nasal about the manner of its production. Judged by Minshull's test, it seemed likely enough that without the medium of his own apparatus it would have been altogether inaudible, or passed for one of the numerous tricks which the atmosphere plays on the wireless enthusiast. There could be no doubt this time what it said, or that it was said in pure English : " A lecture will begin shortly suited to all intelligences. The subject, *Is there a life before Ehtel ?* " Then there was silence again.

" Did you speak ? " asked Mrs. Varley, turning to Miss Rostead.

The situation was explained to her. " Will it be in English ? " she asked, settling down to her knitting with as much sang-froid as if one of the company had proposed a recitation.

" We think probably," said Mrs. Haltwhistle ; " it was announced in English, you see."

The Abbé had possession of Mrs. Varley's more practicable ear. " *Ils ne parlent que leur propre langue, semble-t-il,*" he explained, " *même chez les morts.*"

" Mrs. Haltwhistle," said Minshull, " I want you to wear the head-phones. I'll give you pencil and paper, so that you can take down what you like. Mr. Scoop, if we arrive at a passage in the lecture

which you think is of no great importance from your point of view, you can give me a signal, and I will put my apparatus out of commission for the moment, so that we can say definitely whether that voice is audible or not to the chance listener-in. Thank you. I will just shut the window, I think, to guard against the possibility of our being disturbed by noises from outside."

Hardly a minute passed by after the window had been clasped before the lecture began. The same shrill voice as before (or so it seemed to them) spoke throughout, very slowly, as if the words were being dictated. But the matter of the utterance so arrested their attention that they paid little heed to the manner of its delivery.

CHAPTER VI

IS THERE A LIFE BEFORE EHTEL?

SOME æons ago (observed the lecturer) it would have seemed absurd to raise the question whether there was or was not a life before this. It was taken for granted, even by the coarsest and most irreverent spirits, that the experience which begins for us when we emerge from the River Ehtel was not a broken-off thread, a severance from all previous sensation and even conscious identity, but a passage from the unknown, a continuation of some life of usefulness otherwhere. Much of our mythology was based on this; our poets, for example, drew pictures for us of a previous world by which all the inequalities of our present existence were to be explained; they told us that a spirit obtained illumination and volatility on entering this present life according as it had made good use of the opportunities provided for it in that other life beyond. Such poetry was, of course, only to be taken as poetry; we had no real means of imagining to ourselves the conditions of an existence in which, *ex hypothesi*, we were mysteriously connected with matter and to some extent hampered by the connexion. But, even if the poets failed in the attempt

to draw a convincing picture for us, there was a valuable lesson, a useful moral purpose in their imaginings. It helped us to struggle upwards and to make the most of our opportunities, when we could take warning from these stories, fanciful though they might be, of past failures and even more degraded beginnings.

But it is not to be supposed that our belief in a previous existence rested merely on nursery fables and rhetorical metaphors. Philosophers were prepared to defend the concept on grounds of solid, though of course *a priori* reasoning. In the first place, it was argued that the very different levels of intelligence at which we start on our present career could not be explained by mere arbitrary selection; they must spring from a cause, although in the nature of the case the operation of such causality was beyond our knowledge. Those spirits, for example, in which the cognitive faculty seems at first to be wholly undeveloped must, it was thought, have been subjected to some process of retardation, whether natural or artificial, while others were developing in fuller measure. You are familiar with the speculations of Panjak, who held that the intelligence is necessarily evolved by deliberate growth; "Nature," he said, "does nothing by leaps and bounds," and it was consequently unreasonable to suppose that the higher stages of mental development found even among the spirits which have only just "crossed over" could be accounted for except by the training and discipline which they had received in a forgotten past. Panjak's view has been severely criticized, but when full allowance is made for the justice of such criticisms, it must be admitted that there

is still value in his contentions, and that the presumption which he sets up in favour of a previous existence cannot be lightly brushed aside.

A second indication, which has probably less value, may be found in the more mysterious field of the subconscious. We are all of us familiar with the feeling " I have been here before," " I have met this spirit before," in circumstances where we know that such previous acquaintance is impossible, except on the assumption that there was a life before this. It would be pedantic, in touching upon such subjects, to refrain from using the quotation, well-worn as it is, in which this argument is most beautifully stated—I mean the well-known passage where the poet speaks of—

" Those obdurate questionings
Of sensed exterior things,
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Dark misgivings of a creature
Wandering about in scenes half-realized,
Strange instincts owing to which our mortal nature
Trembles, quite unaccountably surprised;
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the master-light of all our day."

How is it (we ask ourselves) that we so often find, in the mysterious regions of our subconscious life, this strong conviction (for it can hardly be called less) that the experience with which we are in contact is not a new experience but a repetition?

The argument has been developed even further. It has been suggested, for example, that the inspirations

which come to our poets, so strange and sudden in the manner of their coming, are in truth not inspirations at all, but reminiscences of something previously known. Did Benskin, for example, when he composed the words—

> "That unexploréd country to whose bourne
> No voyager returns——"

really evolve that thought out of his own consciousness? Or was some secret spring of memory operating in him, bringing back into the area of consciousness some half-remembered masterpiece which he had encountered elsewhere? More, it is asked, does not the fact that a spirit which has only recently emerged can, at least in the normal instance, apprehend abstruse principles of mathematics and of philosophy indicate some previous culture as its satisfactory explanation?

I will not, for the moment, dwell on certain weaknesses in this theory: I will content myself for the time being with saying that the tendency in recent æons has been to rest less and less of weight upon such arguments. I now come to the third contention, which is the most difficult and yet to my own mind the most cogent of all. How is it that we arrive at the conception of matter? We are conscious of a sphere of being all around us, of which we can say with confidence *that* is it, without being able to form any adequate idea of *what* it is. We call it matter. Many attempts have been made by philosophers to define its nature, as for example *Matter is the inhibition of energy*, or, *Matter is un-self-determined extension in space*, or again *Matter is that which cannot be the object*

of its own thought. But all such guesses at the truth, whatever validity they have, fail to convey any experience of matter to our minds. And yet the concept of matter, or if you will the thought-form of matter, is one which our minds cannot escape from; it is simply there. And it has been very plausibly suggested that the reason for this universal apprehension of our minds lies in an actual past experience —there has been a time, I mean, at which we ourselves lived under conditions which made matter a real and a vital thing to us.

So much for the old-fashioned arguments—I call them old-fashioned, not from any desire to question their value, but merely so as to put them in their proper historical perspective. We must now pass on to consider the attack which has been delivered during the last æon upon these instinctive assumptions of ours—an attack which will always, I suppose, be principally connected with the names of Guillemont and Prendergast. In answer to the first contention given above, Guillemont pointed out that all such arguments necessarily lead to an infinite regress. If the inequalities of opportunity in our present state of existence are to be explained by inequalities of opportunity in a previous existence, then those inequalities in their turn will need an explanation, and so on *ad infinitum.* True, some of the intelligences which emerge here are quite rudimentary, while others can do advanced sums and can think in three or four different languages. But Guillemont confidently appealed to instinct as the cause of this phenomenon. In the normal case, he maintained, spirits can think

in at least one language immediately upon emergence ; only about one per cent. being wholly mute. It was a capital error to build up scientific knowledge on the consideration of exceptions. The gift of language was a natural one, and where it was withheld, the phenomenon must be due to causes of which we can give no account.

As for the argument from " recollections "—supposed to be glimpsed from a previous life—it is safe to say that it can no longer be held. Prendergast gave it its death-blow when he invented the psychological doctrine known as the " consociation of ideas." When two pictures have been present to the mind in close, albeit accidental conjunction, they are stored together in the unconscious memory ; hence when one of the two pictures is brought into the area of consciousness again later on, the second is (so to speak) dragged up with it, but in a blurred and confused form. It is the indistinct consciousness of this second picture in what Prendergast has happily called " the back of the mind " that gives us this strange sense of half-remembered familiarity. As for the idea that the inspirations of the poet are really " reminiscences," he has poured scorn upon it in a well-known utterance. " If I am to be told that Benskin's immortal phrase ' To live or not to live, that is the question ' is only an echo from some poetry known to him in a previous life, why should we not say at once that my own doctrine of the consociation of ideas is only the memory of some doctrine I had learned in a previous life ? Such speculations destroy confidence in our mental processes altogether."

In answer to the third difficulty, Prendergast's

treatment is less satisfactory. He denies, it is well known, the very existence of matter. Nothing is real, he says, except what has been met with in our experience. But no spirit claims to have had any such experience as that of "touch" or "resistance to touch," which the conception of "matter" involves. It is true that we have a perception of objects outside ourselves which do not, in our experience, penetrate one another or occupy the same position with one another in space. But it is by an illegitimate deduction from this very fact (if we are to believe Prendergast) that all our conceptions of matter, touch and the like are derived. Experience only tells us of an absence of penetration; it is only our minds that have built up out of this experience the notion of impenetrability.

This last part of Prendergast's thesis will be, to most minds, the least satisfactory. So far from weakening his opponents' case, he has actually brought forward considerations which go to confirm it. The fact that matter is a thing not met with in our experience is precisely the ground on which it can be most plausibly asserted that the experience of which our memories are conscious is incomplete; that we have had, somewhere, another experience before this, to which the perception of tangibility and impenetrability was familiar. That such notions in us should be confused is only natural; they are conditions of our thought rather than objects of it. It remains probable, in spite of Prendergast's representations to the contrary, that there has been an existence prior to our emergence from the river Ehtel, in which certain

potentialities of our nature, now dormant, found their expression on a so-called material plane.

Hitherto we have been dealing only with *a priori* arguments. But recently, attempts have been made, not altogether unfruitfully, to test these convictions by actual experiment. Philosophers of Guillemont's school deny absolutely the existence of any intelligences other than our own—or at least the fact of their occurrence in our experience. It is notorious, of course, that on the physical plane which intersects ours there are so-called "animal" creatures whose movements suggest the influence of a self-determined activity. But, under careful observation, the great majority of these do not evince any symptoms which preclude the possibility of their being merely mechanical automatons. Considerable attention, however, has lately been paid to the behaviour of those tailless pithecoids to which our naturalists have given the name of "men." For the most part, it must be confessed, their motions resemble those of the other animals. If they have intelligences, these must be of a kind which do not ordinarily admit of intercommunication with our plane. But it has happened more than once of late, unless our investigators are at fault, that intelligible messages have been received from them; not by way of audition (for their faculty of utterance, if they have any, must be altogether outside our auditive compass) but by way of direct thought-transference. The question, for example, "Are there any spirits present?" has repeatedly made itself felt, apparently in connexion with groups of these pithecoids, usually female. To such groupings our Physical

Research Society gives the name of *séances*, and the records, or what purport to be the records, of several may be consulted by the curious.

It must be confessed, of course, that the use of such a clumsy method of communication as thought-transference argues no very high level of intelligence in these creatures; it argues the possession of a sub-consciousness rather than a consciousness (though indeed it is very doubtful if the former can exist without the latter). But a steadily increasing volume of evidence is being collected in this way which makes it difficult to believe that there are not intelligences, albeit rudimentary intelligences, to be found on the physical plane, inseparable apparently from physical bodies. This fact, if it can be fully attested, puts an end to all doubt on one point. It proves abundantly that it is *possible* for intelligences to exist in combination with material bodies, a position which the school of Prendergast and Guillemont, for obvious reasons, denies.

Some members, at least, of the Physical Research Society are inclined to push their speculations much farther. They do not stop short of suggesting that these man-animals are the rude elements to which we owe our origin; are in fact spirits in the making, spirits in the pre-Ehtel stage of their existence. At first sight, no doubt, the idea will seem preposterous. It will seem a degradation to our spiritual nature that we should, at any time, have been bound up with material bodies and been limited by material conditions. The association of our own personalities, even in a remote past, with an order of being demonstrably inferior to ours, strikes us as incongruous and almost

irreverent. But we must not be deterred from the path of scientific inquiry by any preconceived notions of our own dignity and importance. It may be that the race of men, in spite of their gross and lumpish outward appearance, may be capable of a far higher range of spiritual activity than they have hitherto been given credit for. It may be that (in spite of appearances) their movements are not so absolutely dictated to them by physical needs and material considerations as has hitherto been supposed. At least it would seem that the question "Are there any spirits present?" indicates a certain awareness of spiritual possibilities, a certain unformed desire to be in touch with higher forms of life. Is it so certain, after all, that the thought of having risen from such humble origins as these ought not to make us prouder than before, give us more confidence in the upward tendency of our own natures? At least it is clear that the investigations of the Physical Research Society deserve to be pushed forward energetically and fearlessly. There can be no harm in arriving at a better understanding of these creatures which, however low in the spiritual scale, yet show unmistakable signs of spiritual possibilities, and may even be connected with us by origin.

Along what lines (it may be asked) can such investigations be prosecuted most fruitfully? Probably (we reply) in a closer attention to the proceedings of these *séances* than has hitherto been accorded to them by the higher and more intelligent spirits among us. It should be possible to find, in the subconsciousness of the men animals who take part in such *séances*, a

mirror and an echo of their consciousness. It should be possible to form some idea of what thoughts, if any, habitually pass through their minds, what interests they have apart from their merely material interests, and whether they themselves look forward to the possibility of a purely spiritual existence, such as our own, at some future period of their development. We must be prepared for the slow accumulation of results, and even for disappointments. Research does not offer her prizes to the apathetic and casual inquirer; concentration of effort is needed, and a humble spirit of willingness to learn new truths, however difficult it may seem to fit them into our presupposed scheme of knowledge.

CHAPTER VII

DOGMATISM IN DIFFICULTIES

THE silence that followed was first broken by a wail from Shurmur, who had his head buried in his hands. "Gaedke!" he cried. "He doesn't know—he's forgotten all about it!"

"Really, Mr. Shurmur," said Mrs. Haltwhistle, "this is not a moment for thinking about private quarrels. Surely this afternoon's revelations must be thought-provoking to all of us. But oh, Mr. Scoop, what does it all mean?"

Mr. Scoop's face was white, but his tongue did not refuse its office. "Mrs. Haltwhistle, there was one word at least of that utterance which, as enlightened seekers after truth, we cannot but echo—I mean the word that came last. 'A spirit of willingness to learn new truths, however hard it may seem to fit them into our preconceived scheme of knowledge.' That at least we must always ask for. It is quite true that what we have just heard is not at all what we should have expected to have heard. It seems almost impossible to make it harmonize with much that we have taken for granted about the spirits hitherto. But we must not neglect any new piece of knowledge

because at first sight it does not seem to fit in; that would be to fall into the mistake of the old dogmatists. Mr. Minshull, I say again, I am grateful to you for the privilege of attending the meetings of this circle, and I shall still be grateful, even if the results of our researches make it necessary to abandon much that we thought static in our old beliefs."

"But it's terrible," urged Mrs. Haltwhistle; "it means that the spirits don't remember what happened in this life!"

"And would that be so terrible?" asked the Abbé. "Ah, madame, if only the dead could forget!"

"If you ask *me*," said Miss Rostead (though nobody had, and nobody was likely to), "I think that's about the most cheering account of a future life I ever heard. Who'd want to go on always remembering a rotten old world like this? People talk about the pleasures of memory; but what does one get out of memory if one stops to consult it? One's unpaid bills, the endorsements on one's driving licence, and the men one danced with last season! No, I'm for the present; and if there is any future present (if you see what I mean), by all means let 'em get on with it. That's what I say."

"The question is not what one wants," observed Mrs. Varley with unnecessary grimness; "it's what one's going to get."

"But memory, Mrs. Varley!" persisted Mrs. Haltwhistle. "Think how determinedly it entwines itself around the past! Kitty's young, of course, and she doesn't see things in the same light; but you and I

know how much memory IS us, if you understand what I mean! Doesn't the very fact that we cling so to our memories in life mean that we wouldn't let go, whatever happened—nothing would ever make us let go?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Varley, softened in spite of herself, "there are plenty of people who cling on to life like that. But they have to let go all the same. Mightn't it be the same with memory?"

"You will pardon me," put in Mr. Scoop, "but I think I can put Mrs. Haltwhistle's argument in a rather different shape." (This was the formula by which Mr. Scoop was in the habit of introducing totally new arguments of his own.) "Surely, as Mrs. Haltwhistle says, memory *is* we, in a very real sense? What am I? Nothing else, if you look at the thing closely, but the sum of my past experiences, tied up together in a bundle with that string we call memory. The cells of memory are the tissues out of which the mind-life is built up. Personality, believe me, is nothing else than the harvest of our memories."

"Then you would say," suggested the Abbé, "that a man cannot lose his memory? Or rather, that if a man loses his memory, then it is no longer the same man, but a different one? And if he has committed murder, he must no longer be hanged, because he is a person altogether different?"

Miss Rostead saved the company from a long debate on idealism by her fortunate intervention. "But you're forgetting the Unc," she said. "You aren't going to be so old-fashioned as to leave *that* out? Surely all that business about recollections from a

previous life means that they've still got their Unc's with them."

"I think Miss Rostead's right," put in Minshull judicially. "If you come to think of it, all the poetry that was quoted in that lecture was really Wordsworth and Shakespeare, only about every third word had been remembered wrong. And yet they obviously think it's all original stuff. Surely that means that it's survived, or rather bits of it have survived, in the unconscious memory, and have been pieced out by the spirits with gag of their own? Unconscious quotation isn't such a rare thing: didn't Wordsworth in that very passage talk about Nature trembling like a guilty thing surprised? He'd forgotten that he was thinking of Hamlet, where the Ghost vanishes like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons; Milton, if I remember, does the same."

"Yes, and the language difficulty," said Shurmur. "Explains the language difficulty. They keep their subconscious trick of talking, each in his own language, don't you see, though they don't remember how or why."

"It's certainly worth thinking of, that point of view," admitted Scoop. "Probably we have not yet sounded the depths of the subconscious; there are possibilities about it which still baffle us. And in fairness we shall have to face the question whether it is the consciousness or the subconsciousness of the spirits that the *séance* puts us in contact with. It's worth thinking of."

"And of course, the Unc isn't always very proper," said Miss Rostead thoughtfully. "Freud lets you see

that, you know. And that would explain why some of the remarks the spirits make aren't always quite *pour jeunes filles*. You remember, Con, that evening at the Petersons'——"

"But I don't want to be a subconsciousness! I want to be myself, to remember my friends; I want the next life to be a continuation, not a fresh story."

"You see, madame," said the Abbé, "you are a dogmatist after all. You do not any longer like your experiments, when they do not tell you what you want them to tell you."

"And you, sir," retorted Mr. Scoop, "what has become of your dogmatisms? Where are your heaven and hell, if the spirits no longer retain any memories of their mortal existence?"

"That is certainly odd," admitted the Abbé; "in fact, for me it is altogether too odd. I do not know what I am to make of these spirits who have no brain —for they cannot have any brain if there is no matter in them—and yet have a subconsciousness all the same, and can make wrong associations of ideas. That is to me, you see, not sense; and I will not believe even experience itself if it will not make sense. That it is, you see, to be a dogmatist."

"Then may I ask," urged Mr. Scoop, "what it is you think we have been listening to?"

"How shall I say? About that, you see, I am agnostic."

"And yet, what account is there to be given of it? Believe what you like about the spirits, tell us that they are devils or whatever you will, but is it in their own interest, to put it vulgarly, to represent themselves

as spirits which have forgotten their earthly past, and consequently can tell us nothing? Suppose, *per impossibile*, that some neighbour is playing a prank on us, is it conceivable that he would be able to sustain, on the spur of the moment, the part of a disembodied spirit with such accuracy? Suppose that some inferior order of intelligence, an impish 'control,' were trying to make game of us, it is incredible, in the light of all our experience, that it could sustain so grave a manner for such a length of time. I would as willingly disbelieve all this as you, or as Mrs. Haltwhistle. But I am a seeker; the Truth is my lodestar. I must follow where it leads."

"But—but think of the waste!" spluttered Shurmur. "Think of a man who devotes a whole life to learning, and then wakes up in another world with nothing to show for it except a few instincts!"

"And yet, Mr. Shurmur, your classical friends seemed to think it possible. The whole theory of metempsychosis involves such forgetfulness of all we have learned."

"By the way," said Minshull, "what did you make of the name of that river, Mrs. Haltwhistle? The one which the spirits emerged from?"

"I think it must be Ehtel; either that or Echtel. There was a distinct aspiration about the first vowel."

And she showed the word in her notes across the table. "By Jove!" said Shurmur suddenly, fixing the word with his outstretched spectacles. "Do you see what it is? Do you see what the word is? It's Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, spelt back ways round!"

" This," said Scoop, " is of the highest interest. But now, why back ways round ? "

" Oh," said Shurmur, " that might be all right, mightn't it ? What I mean is, if it's the river of L-E-T-H-E that lies ahead of us, wouldn't it be the river of E-H-T-E-L that lies behind them ? Like reading BAR PARLOUR, you know, from inside." He had forgotten his depression all at once, full of the scholar's excitement at the solving of a problem.

" My word, you've got it ! " cried Minshull. " Shurmur, I believe there's some use in your old dry-as-dust business after all."

" And observe once more," added Scoop, " how much we have to learn from the ancient mythologies. Somehow they had seen things which have been hidden from us till now. Pythagoras, perhaps, who had drunk in so much of the Eastern wisdom, and given it a home, or tried to give it a home, in Western thought. We shall go back to the East, gentlemen ; we shall go back to the East. It is there that the light dawns ! "

" Well, you know, if you're prepared to take the word of these classical fellows—mind you, I don't say they know anything about it—Lethe ain't the same thing as what we call crossing over. It comes later on, if you see what I mean ; after a thousand years, Plato said, and there's the same sort of idea in Virgil. Orphic, perhaps ; nobody knows much. But what I mean is, there may be two grades of spirits, don't you see ; two stages : first stage, where they've crossed over but still remember ; second stage, where they've been through a further change,

and by then, you see, it looks as if they'd forgotten all about it."

"But exactly!" cried Scoop; "that would explain the whole thing. The spirits we've hitherto been in contact with, at the *séances*, are of the first order of spirits; they still remember, and still know how to get in touch with us. But what they've never yet told us, perhaps because they didn't know, is what lies ahead of them, what future is theirs. But *we* know—now. We know that what awaits them is this further illumination which is also an obscuration—a forgetting of all they no longer need to know. Thenceforward they are like blades which have been cleaned in the earth: all the rust has worn away from them, and they are clean, and shining, and fit for use once more."

"But the waste, Mr. Scoop!" protested Mrs. Haltwhistle. "All the education the spirits have received, some of it here, and some beyond, all going for nothing! That they should have to start fair again at the end!"

"I don't know about that," said Minshull, tugging at his moustache. "Isn't that rather like life? Think of all the elaborate education boys get at school, and the very little they remember of it. I don't think I could do a simultaneous equation now. But when paterfamilias complains that all this is rather a waste of money, the educational experts soothe him down by telling him about the general effect of such culture on the mind, and all that. To leave College and go out into the world—isn't that a process of illumination which is also an obscuration, just like the one Mr. Scoop was talking about?"

"In any case," Scoop pointed out, "we've only touched the fringe of the subject so far. We've heard one lecture, but that has told us very little, except by implication, about the conditions under which these spirits live. I look forward to overhearing a good deal more of the same kind: and that should enable us to present the Physical Research Society with a report which will make them sit up and take notice."

"That's just like you scientific people," explained Mrs. Varley, who had been going on with her knitting hitherto in apparent unconcern. "All you want is some new, revolutionary theory so that you can make your names over it. There's more credit for you in that than in plodding along on the old lines. And you never worry about the feelings of old-fashioned people like Mrs. Haltwhistle and myself."

It is doubtful whether Mrs. Haltwhistle quite appreciated this bracketing of herself with the past. But in her present state of mind she was thankful for any ally. "I think that's so true, Mrs. Varley. Why can't we leave all that side of it alone, and try to find out some more about the spirits that have only just passed over and are still warm with the memories of their past, something that will be really helpful and uplifting to us?"

"My dear Con," objected Miss Rostead, "you will always talk about listening to the spirits as if it were merely a matter of getting Bournemouth. You can't reasonably expect them to dance to any tune you want just because *you* want it. If you listen in when they're talking to one another you must take what

you get. I vote we go on with the lot we've got in touch with already."

"But you will observe," the Abbé pointed out, "that we have been sitting here many minutes, and so far nothing more has come through. Yet I think Mr. Minshull has not disconnected his instruments."

"That's true," admitted Minshull. "And it's true also, now I come to think of it, that the wave-length we've got now isn't the only one that produces odd noises when my apparatus is going. If you like, padre, we'll cast about for a scent."

"But you must not disturb yourself for me," said the Abbé, taking out his watch. "It is four o'clock now, and I must go home, because I have an instruction. But perhaps I will call to-morrow morning again, and then we will see what you are doing."

The Abbé's departure broke up the company for the time being. Shurmur, whose system claimed a daily constitutional of approximately the same length and elevation as that involved by climbing Headington Hill, suggested a walk; the gathering dusk, now that the mist had lifted a little, was more inviting than the daylight, and he felt cramped after his motionless attention to the lecture. He was greatly relieved when he found that his host was the only member of the party prepared to accompany him. He wanted more air and less Scoop.

He drank in nothing of mystery from the exterior circumstances of their walk, from stealthily dripping branches, and fantastic tree-shapes, and huge barns that loomed up suddenly in front of you, and early lights

twinkling on distant hill-sides, and the silent carpet of moss underfoot. Yet air and the familiar exercise of his limbs and the effortlessness of conversation with an old friend refreshed his jaded nerves. He found opportunity too, for giving form to the questions that lurked on the borderland of his own mind, penned up hitherto with the shy man's reluctance to force any entrance into general conversation.

"What are you making of it all, Minshull? Not saying much. You don't believe in this sort of thing, or didn't. What about it?"

"Well, you know, I think the part that doesn't interest you is the part that interests me. It's the same, you see, with all this wireless business. I like playing the fool with it; always did like playing the fool with science. Remember Barlow's form, and how I used to sneak off into the chemical lab. when he'd called the names and was too blind to see what was going on?"

"Yes. Wonder what's happened to old Barlow. What were you saying?"

"Well, I like trying experiments. But as for that stuff the B.B.C. feeds to you, weather reports, and so on, I give you my word I don't listen to it above once in a month. Well, don't you see, it's the same with this spirit stuff. I'm testing my apparatus all the time; I don't much care what comes through. Are they really spirits talking? Or is it Old Harry, as the padre probably thinks? Or are they echoes of something that is going on or has gone on somewhere in the world? I don't much care, as long as there are sounds to be heard."

"Yes, but a future life, you know. Religion, that kind of thing."

"Religion? What's it got to do with that? Oh, of course, if you believe very violently in a heaven or a hell or both, I can understand getting excited about it, and wanting other people to get excited about it. I quite see the Abbé's point of view. A future life's exciting enough as long as you think that everything depends on the present. But these spirits *you* deal in, these people who talk copy-book platitudes and spend their time going to concerts and lectures, what have they to do with me? Do I care whether they remember what they've left behind or not? You know how it is with fellows leaving school: some feel frightfully patriotic, and take in the magazine, and all that kind of thing—I never did. And I feel very much the same about life; I haven't had an unhappy life, but if you ask me whether I want to remember the sort of place the world is—the horrible people who are struggling to get on in Society, and the bores, and the toadies, and the people who say 'I don't suppose you remember me, but we met once at Brighton'—I think I'd just as soon not. Death is there in front of you, like a severe operation. I don't know whether I want to recover from it or not. Of course, if they'd let me have the things I want, my stick, and my dog, and my own fireside, it would be worth thinking of; but that's obviously just what I shan't get. I don't think I care."

"Don't know—yes—there's that point of view. But the parsons make a great fuss about it."

"Ah, yes, it's all very well for religious people.

They've been saving up, you see—they've got a little nest-egg waiting for them. Naturally enough, they want to see the colour of their money; I can understand that. But have you or I banked a farthing on eternity? Perhaps you have: I don't know; I only know that I haven't. I've got this place: I like it, and I shall stick to it as long as the medicos keep me above ground. But on the other side, I haven't a foot of land to call my own."

"But, you know, some people can't bear the idea of stopping *doing* things, if you see what I mean. Mrs. Haltwhistle's like that. You know the kind of thing—Rugby Chapel—'sounding labour-house vast'; that sort of stuff."

"I know; but that's only because people get their machinery going so hard that it doesn't feel as if it would ever run down. So they say they'll go on doing something useful on the other side. I don't think that's much improvement on the idea of doing nothing for ever and ever. All depends on the point of view. You go to a housemaid who's scrubbed floors for forty years without stopping, and tell her she's being taken away to a career of continued usefulness elsewhere; will she thank you? What about you? Do you see yourself editing Persius *ad infinitum*?"

"No; don't know that I look at it quite like that. But you see, there's curiosity. Such a lot of things one wants to know, wants to be certain of."

"Whether Virgil really wrote the *Culex*—that sort of thing? Yes, but are you certain you'll want to know when you get over there? Won't it be all like

the solution of a puzzle, which nobody ever bothers to read?

> 'When I am grown to man's estate
> I shall be very proud and great,
> And tell the other girls and boys
> Not to meddle with my toys.'

Mayn't it be rather like that when you get to the other side?"

"Yes, but there's curiosity on this side too. If there is a spirit world—I mean to say one that's getatable—you must want to know about it, don't you? I mean, as if they discovered a new Continent; something of that sort."

"Do I? I can't make out. The world's so dashed full of people already, without having these ghosts swarming round. I'll tell you what it is, or what I think it is—I believe the Abbé's right when he says these spirits are a disappointment because they always say the sort of thing you'd expect them to say. They're so colourless; just like ordinary people, apparently, except that they've no moral interest. Don't you see that they lack moral interest? They don't do things—fall in love with one another or murder one another. They just behave like shadows; and their idea of spending an exciting afternoon seems to be going to a concert. At least, if you can believe the things you read about them."

"They were more original, eh, this afternoon?"

"Oh, you found that exciting, did you? It seemed to me just as dull as all the rest of the stuff. I don't feel as if I wanted to know the people, that's all. Of

course, I can understand a man like Scoop being interested in it all, because it's his hobby ; he does it for the fun of doing it, just as I play about with the wireless. But I can't understand why a man like you, Shurmur, wants to be told about the results they get, any more than I can understand these people who listen-in, as they call it."

By now they were turning in at the forlorn-looking front gate which indicated Minshull's indifference as to whether the world called on him or no. " One thing," said Shurmur as he scraped his boots, " I won't sit next Mrs. Haltwhistle at dinner."

CHAPTER VIII

SHURMUR DREAMS

THE glow of dying embers shone faintly on the oak panels of Shurmur's bedroom ; now and again a charred log, that hitherto seemed endowed with a miraculous tenacity, owned itself beaten and fell softly in half. The two halves winked at each other for a little as if they were enjoying a joke at the scholar's expense, then blushed as they were caught at it, then slipped away into the darkness. The wind outside (for the March wind had risen again) tugged at the open leaded window as if it were certain that it only needed a little force to do the trick ; the window rattled irritably, pointing out that it was no use. The blind-cord inside kept on tapping at the panes, like an imprisoned heroine beckoning to her deliverer. At intervals there was a drip on the floor, where the owner of the room had spilt his tooth-water overnight.

All this is in itself very little to the purpose, for Shurmur was asleep. But they tell us that outside noises do sometimes contribute to the happenings of a dream, so there may have been some importance even in the blind-cord. Unless, indeed, those omni-

scient people are right who tell us that dreams only come at the moment of waking; but after all, how do they know? When Shurmur woke up he had the impression of having dreamed all night; and who was to know if not he? However, it must be confessed that he was never conscious of all the tiny bustle that was going on about him while he slept, though he found out about the dripping of the water when he trod in it next morning.

Whatever awareness survives in sleep bade Shurmur believe that he was sitting in the Common-room at Salisbury. There was a loud speaker just under old Huyshe's portrait, and he was listening to it. (This should have given the dream away, for the Fellows of Salisbury, though I hear they allow bicycles to be leant against the front of the College now, were not the men to encourage wireless telegraphy in the home.) While he was doing this, Gaedke walked in; there was no mistaking Gaedke, with his great china-bowled pipe, and the spectacles, and the dachshund, and the rude way in which he told Miss Rostead to stop powdering her nose. There was nothing ghostly about him. He took up the loud speaker, a trumpet-shaped one, and put it close to the dreamer's ear; then in a very high, squeaky voice he told him an answer to the Abbé's doubts about Spiritualism. It was an entirely satisfactory answer, so satisfactory that it seemed incredible nobody should have thought of it before. It was very kind of Gaedke; there seemed to be no sort of reason why the Master, who was reading the *Evening Standard*, should roll it up into a ball and throw it at Gaedke's head. What

made it more annoying was that the *Evening Standard* had a leading article about Persius. There was only one thing to be done, to throw Gaedke off the end of the pier; but it was very hard to catch him when he would bicycle so fast. However, he ran, and as he did so he remembered the reason why he was running; he had forgotten the argument about Spiritualism. It was a fortunate circumstance that Mrs. Varley stopped Gaedke with a hayfork just as he got to Folly Bridge. After that, Gaedke was much quieter, and told him the argument all over again as they went up Headington Hill. It was very important that he should get it now, because now he was just going to wake up, and of course, if one was not careful, one forgot things when one woke up. Yes, that was it . . . that was it . . . eight thousand and forty-nine, eight thousand and forty-nine . . .

Yes, he was awake now. Looking back on the incidents of the night, he became conscious that some of them could not really have happened. Mrs. Varley and the hayfork, for example, that detail seemed improbable. Yes, and Gaedke—of course Gaedke was dead, so he could not really have come into the Common-room; besides, there was no pier in the Common-room, and Miss Rostead would not have been there. However, he had made sure of one thing, he had got the crushing argument which would make the Abbé recant his opinions about Spiritualism; it was lucky that he took such care to repeat it to himself as he awoke. What was it? Oh yes, eight thousand and forty-nine; there was no way of getting out of that; eight thousand and forty-nine! Only . . .

yes, it didn't look quite so good now. Hullo! There was that man turning his socks inside out. It was silly, because it gave one all the trouble of turning them outside in again. His bath? Oh yes, ready; thank you. Now, what was that about eight thousand and forty-nine? Absurd as it now appeared, he had found some reason for thinking that this was a suitable retort to the Abbé. Oh dear, he had been dreaming; that was all.

He came down to the dining-room, to find Minshull and Mrs. Varley at breakfast, and Mr. Scoop jealously measuring out from a cardboard box those strange health-foods which served him instead of breakfast. The absence of Miss Rostead, with her uncomfortable allusions to Freud, emboldened him to recount his dream in the old-fashioned manner. Mrs. Varley, as was to be expected, rallied him on the subject of last night's *menu*; Minshull was more sympathetic, and took the opportunity to generalize.

"Why do dreams in stories, and in alleged history for the matter of that, always take a coherent and sensible form? When I dream I always go through the same sort of absurdities as you did. I shouldn't like to be a prophet who was expected to interpret your visions, Shurmur."

"The art of oneiromancy," said Mr. Scoop, stirring what Mrs. Varley called his "mash" in two tablespoonfuls of hot water, "is probably one of the lost arts. But you must remember, Mr. Minshull, that it includes two things. It enables you not merely to tell a man what his dream meant, but to tell him what his dream was. You will see that in Exodus—

or is it Genesis? It escapes me, but the argument is not affected. Now, Mr. Shurmur, I don't doubt that you are telling us in all good faith what you think you dreamt—nay, what you thought you had dreamt at the moment when you woke up. But remember, as you woke up, imagination was at work side by side with memory, piecing out its work and filling in the gaps—all quite unconsciously, for you were not yet fully awake. It has always seemed to me very probable that in sleep that unknown part of us which responds to psychic influences has, if it did but know it, been wandering in secret places, where great illumination might have been given to it."

"Not much use, eh?" objected Shurmur. "Not much use being given illumination if you wake up and forget all about it. Should have thought it was unnecessary, rather."

"Ah, but if we still cultivated the art of oneiromancy, you would find some gifted friend who would remind you what your dream really was, and as he recounted it to you you would admit that it had all happened just so—the chords of memory would be reawakened. As things are at present dreams, as you say, are not of much value in themselves. But I am inclined to attach great importance myself to inspirations and even auditions which come to us just at the moment of waking. Now, about this number you found yourself repeating, eight thousand and something—was it simply presented to your mind in the dream itself? Or were you actually conscious of hearing the words spoken in your ear as you woke up?"

"I told you it was Gaedke who mentioned the

number; in the dream, of course. At least, come to think of it, he had the face of our College porter, don't you know. Only I knew he was Gaedke somehow."

"But you are sure that those words were not audibly repeated, except by yourself?"

"Don't see how they could be, don't see how they could be. What I mean to say is, there was nobody in the room except that fellow fiddling with my socks; what would he be counting for? And I haven't got eight thousand socks, anyhow."

Mr. Scoop smiled indulgently. "There are psychic auditions, you know. Of course, from what we were told yesterday it seems likely that the spirits don't ordinarily speak in voices which fall within our compass. But—well, let us say that their unspoken thoughts have power, sometimes, to clothe themselves in an experience of common human speech. Now, if you had heard those words pronounced I should say they were certainly a message. Even as it is, I should say they were very probably a message."

"Excuse me, Mr. Scoop," said Mrs. Varley, "but if you're not using the toast, might I have it this end?"

"To be sure. A thousand pardons. The toast—I never touch it; it disagrees with me. Now, what I'm saying to myself, Mr. Shurmur, is this: isn't it possible that the spirits, aware of our discoveries, are anxious to convey some information to us, and have chosen this opportunity of sending you a message?"

"Wish they'd sent it to Mrs. Haltwhistle. Anyhow, what's the sense of it? Eight thousand and

forty-nine—or was it four thousand and eighty-nine? I'm hanged if I remember."

"Eight thousand and forty-nine; you said so distinctly. Now, what I'm suggesting is that after breakfast we should try to find out what that number means—by Planchette, if necessary."

It says much for the forcible personality of Mrs. Varley that the consultation of Planchette should have worn the air of a conspiracy, being conducted, indeed, while Mrs. Varley was interviewing the cook about luncheon. Mrs. Haltwhistle was down in time to help, and Minshull seemed to take an interest in the proceedings.

"You're coming round to it, Minshull," said Shurmur. "Always the way, people start by making fun of it, get interested in spite of themselves."

"I always like new experiences," said Minshull, guardedly. "What do we do, exactly?"

Planchette was put out on the library table, and the situation was explained. From the first, the instrument worked easily, and achieved a success which one, at least, of the party had never dared to hope for. The dialogue was something as follows:

"Are there any spirits present?"

"*Yes.*"

"What spirit is that?"

"*Otto Gaedke.*"

Shurmur's fingers trembled so that the pencil wavered up and down like a barograph in an earthquake season. Mrs. Haltwhistle almost had to shake him to restore his composure.

"Have you a message for Mr. Shurmur?"

"*Yes.*"
"Is it about Persius?"
"*Yes.*"
"What is it?"
"*Eight thousand and forty-nine.*"
"Explain yourself. We do not understand."
"*I have told you.* 8049."
"Is it a telephone number?"
"*No.*"
"What use is it to us?"
"*Try it.*"
"Is it a line of poetry?"
"*No.*"
"Where shall we find the number?"
"*Get it.*"
"What is it the number of?"
"*Wave-length.*"

Minshull slapped his forehead. "The wave-length, of course! Idiot that I was not to have understood! That's the wave-length, don't you see, which will help us to get on to some different kind of spirits, or something of that sort." The dialogue continued:

"Will this wave-length put us in touch with a different kind of spirits?"
"*Yes.*"
"Do they remember the past?"
"*Yes.*"
"Is that the group of spirits which you belong to?"
"*Of course.*"
"Do you remember Persius?"
"*Yes.*"
"Quote some of it to us."

It must be admitted that the answer to this challenge was prompt rather than illuminating. It consisted of a series of loops, the kind of loops that may be L's or E's or M's or N's or almost anything. Shurmur, however, managed with some difficulty to construe it into *Diluis elleborum*? upon a closer examination. The inquiry, to his great regret, could be prosecuted no further at the moment, for the tapping of Mrs. Varley's stick was heard on the staircase; Planchette had to be ignominiously hidden away, as an unauthorized translation might be hidden away by schoolboys on the approach of a master, and the whole company fell into strained attitudes of innocence.

"The Abbé will be here in a few minutes," she announced. "He was having to bury the poor creature who died the night before last—when he was called out, you remember."

And indeed it was not long before he arrived. Miss Rostead had joined them in the meantime, looking (as Mrs. Varley rudely said afterwards) like Venus rising from a flour-barrel. Minshull was adjured to get 8049 with as little delay as possible—it was past the hour at which the music had come through the day before, and they had a kind of superstitious feeling that the 8049 programme would necessarily take place at the same hour. The mechanism, however, seemed to be more refractory this morning; the butler had to be rung for, and spanners to be fetched. When contact was established, it came quite suddenly, and obviously in the middle of a sentence. The voice was still a ludicrously high squeak, the utterance as before painfully slow. But this time they

were evidently in the thick of the day's communications.

" . . . that concludes the list of arrivals. You will now be given to-day's great thoughts. To-day's great thoughts are now beginning. There is no death : what seems so is transition ; this life of mortal breath is but the gateway of the life Elysian whose portals we call death. *Longfellow.* Greatness is an accident that may come to us from without ; goodness is a flower that springs from the soil of our own personality. *Mrs. Macgregor.* The Roman Emperor counted a day lost on which he had not performed a good action ; but how easy it is to lose twenty-three hours of your day ! *The Reverend James Sparling.* It is better to make one true friend than to amass a great fortune. *Rabbi ben Shayat.* We needs must love the highest when we see it. *Alfred Lord Tennyson.* Power does not mean imposing your will upon your fellow-creatures, it means having the freedom of that city which is in truth your own city—the freedom of your soul. *Hoskins J. Whittaker.* The only virtue is enthusiasm. *Rostand.* I do not call a man wise if he understand all the motions of the stars, and all the learned books which have been written by the ancients, and the ways of the beasts and the birds according to their kind ; I call that man wise, who understands his own heart and can regulate its passions successfully. *Chandranath Gunjee.* One day a poor beggar came to the court of King Chilperic, " Give me," he said, " all I need, which is a crust of bread to satisfy my hunger." " Alas ! " said the monarch, " I would give thee all the wealth I possess if thou wouldest teach me how to

be satisfied so easily." *Anonymous mediæval writer.* The key to the riddle of the Universe is not force or change: it is simply love. *Donald Fergusson, D.D.* That concludes to-day's great thoughts. The spirits will be allowed the customary two hours to meditate on them, after which the spirit of James Pargrave, having now passed its decennial stage, will give a lecture under the title "The world which we have left as it must be to-day."

"What healing words!" It was (it need hardly be said) Mrs. Haltwhistle who thus summed up the situation. "And how wonderful that thoughts which have been written by mortal pens can be a legacy and an inspiration even beyond the grave! Ah, if only the spirits had given us some of their own wisdom instead of their memories! And yet it's what we wanted—to know that there is memory, there is continuity. To meditate for two hours! How peaceful!"

"It sounds rather slow work, Con," said Miss Rostead dubiously. "I don't somehow see myself doing it."

"You will feel differently about it then, Miss Rostead," suggested Mr. Scoop. "We have so much of husk, you know, to leave behind. After all, it's the chrysalis and the butterfly over again, isn't it? Remember, we have no idea how quickly time may pass on the other side. I think I understood you to say, Mr. Minshull, that the slowness of the articulation is merely due to your apparatus—the vibrations must be slowed down so that the pitch should be audible? Quite so. Now, Ponder has recently suggested that

time itself is only a series of vibrations. So it is not impossible that spirit time may be quite different from ours, and that the time-space during which the spirits will actually be engaged in assimilating those grand yet simple lessons will only be the equivalent of ten minutes here, or at least of a great deal less than two hours."

"*Il le faudrait,*" observed the Abbé, addressing the ceiling.

"I wonder," said Minshull, "is it safe to assume that the pause will last for two hours of our time? It's only twenty minutes or so to luncheon."

"I will make myself responsible as before," Mr. Scoop assured him. "I am very much interested in these particular revelations: did you notice, I mean, that the lecture was to be on what the world *must* be like at the present moment? That suggests, you see, that although the spirits, at the stage we are now dealing with, retain their memories of the past, they have no distinct consciousness of what goes on in the world at present. This is a point we have always had some difficulty in clearing up, and it seems to me as if we were now on the track of it. With your permission, I will go and fetch my vitaminoids now, and then I can take my own lunch while remaining on guard. If you would be so kind, perhaps, as to have a glass of hot water sent up to me? That will be all I shall want."

"But look here," said Shurmur, "even if they don't know what's going on in the world from moment to moment, there must be up-to-date information, eh? What I mean is, if there are spirits crossing over all

the time, they must bring the latest news with them, you'd have thought. What's the need of guessing; guessing, I mean?"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Scoop solemnly, "you must remember that a spirit which has newly crossed over does not necessarily graduate all at once into the inner circles. There may for all we know be some kind of inhibition which prevents the newly arrived spirits from disclosing what they know. It would appear, from the reference to a decennial stage, that the inhibition only lasts for ten years."

"And that," suggested Mrs. Varley, "would only seem like ten months, eh, Mr. Scoop? On the principle you were explaining just now. Mind you, I don't know that I could keep my mouth shut all that time; but, as you say, one never knows till one has tried."

Shurmur was obviously deep in calculation. "Do you know, Minshull," he said at last, "I believe it's just ten years ago that Gaedke crossed over? And this inhibition, you see, this inhibition may have been what prevented us from getting any answers out of him up till now, whereas this morning——" He remembered Mrs. Varley's presence, and gasped feebly.

"This morning, as you say," put in Minshull, coming to his rescue, "he may have been lecturing on Persius, and we may have missed it. Well, let's come and have some luncheon."

The meal was somewhat distrait, the shadow of the lecture already hanging over the party; there were anxious consultations of watches, there was ill-con-

cealed impatience to be finished. The reader shall not be kept waiting. It was punctually at the end of two hours after the announcement that a voice, not distinguishable (in its high treble) from the voice they had already heard, gave them fresh material for discussion, in an utterance which shall be fully reported in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX

A PRIORI

IT is a capital mistake to suppose that we spirits who are so intimately connected by a thousand ties with those we left on earth, are condemned to languish in perpetual ignorance of how things have developed since we came over here, of the course of that history in which circumstances have allowed us to take no part. It is true that, by a very wise ordinance, no spirit is allowed to supply any information to its neighbours as to the state of affairs which it has just left. It would obviously be unbecoming for the new arrival to find itself in the position of instructing its seniors ; it would lead to painful feelings of neglect on their part and (if I may be permitted to say so) danger of self-conceit on its own. But it is, as you know, the custom that any spirit which has attained its tenth year of seniority here may, if it is so inclined and if its record seems to demand it, deliver a lecture on the state of the world as it must be presumed to be at the moment of utterance. I say, as it must be presumed to be ; for there can be, in the nature of the case, no experimental knowledge of the matters under dis-

cussion. The lecturer must depend, for his materials, upon a reasonable calculation of the probabilities. Nor let it be said that such estimates are of necessity hazardous and unsatisfactory. There are permanent tendencies in the progress of human affairs, permanent laws of change and of development, which enable the careful student to speak with tolerable certainty about the facts in question, even though he has predeceased them by a decade.

In this decennial lecture I intend to give as far as possible a *general* survey of world conditions, not confining myself to any one country or any limited group of interests. But, since I am addressing myself to English-thinking spirits, I shall, I hope, be pardoned if I keep the English-speaking countries specially in view, and ask you to regard my observations as applicable to them in the first instance, to other parts of the world only secondarily and with qualifications. It is hardly possible to doubt, in any case, that the future of the terrestrial world lies with them. Civilization is not a gospel which has to be preached, it is an influence which pervades, a leaven which automatically overcomes. And if we of the English-speaking world find ourselves, under our present conditions, in a minority, and from some points of view at a disadvantage, we must believe that it will not always be so; that, in the long run, the Anglo-Saxon instinct for colonization will not be limited to a particular world or a particular mode of existence.

For a starting point, let us take a look at the state of Europe as it was ten years since. It will be within

the memories of some of you, that the whole of Europe presented at that time the spectacle of an armed camp. Nations, that had long been living peacefully side by side, sharing (ostensibly at any rate) the same civilized ideals, freely interchanging not only their material produce but the highest fruits of their intellectual culture, suddenly found themselves isolated, as by some strange chemical experiment, into two polarized groups. Frontiers, which for half a century or more had seemed (like the Equator) to be merely imaginary lines, achieved hard though fluid outlines of demarcation such as intervene between oil and vinegar. Nor was that discrepancy a discrepancy merely of historical tradition or of patriotic sentiment. There was a real divergence of moral ideals. On the one side, the Central Empires stood for the doctrine of force ; pinned their faith to the conviction that the rivalry between nations was merely a continuation, on a higher level, of the struggle for existence which has resulted in the survival of certain natural types, the disappearance of others. National virility, calling into play every possible resource of violence or of cunning, should impose its will upon a conquered enemy.

On the other side, how different the picture ! The nations of the *Entente*, combined, despite wide differences of race, language, religion, and even interest by a common perception of justice, stood for the principle that those laws of survival and disappearance which operate in the history of the animal creation as such, have no place in deciding the destiny of intellectual beings, whether taken singly or in the group. The principle that Right, like Truth, will prevail of its own

weight; it will always rally to its side champions powerful enough to defend it successfully. They held that every well-defined and self-contained racial group has a divine right to determine its own constitution and to form its own political alliances, however such rights may conflict with the territorial ambitions of more powerful neighbours. Nor was it only in criticism of their enemies that they accepted these elementary claims of justice; confronted with the spectacle of unabashed self-seeking and cynical injustice in the camp of their rivals, they learned to see, as in a mirror, the picture of their own infidelities to civilization; they declared, in a hundred unhesitating documents, their love of peace, their passion for justice, their resolve to set the world right. It was a new awakening of the world's conscience.

And the awakening was not merely national; it was political, it was social, it was personal. Within the nation, rival interests of class and class, of trade and trade, that we had long thought irreconcilable, were suddenly found to be rival interests no longer; in the hour of general peril, such petty quarrels were forgotten. Men widely different in opportunities of birth and in stamp of education suddenly fraternized and felt their common humanity. Above all, the selfishness which had so long characterized the outlook of the individual, the worship of "Number One," the mad race for money, the unreasoning appetite for pleasure, disappeared all in a moment. The more natural ideal of self-effacement and self-sacrifice quietly asserted itself—a peaceful revolution of which none but close observers were aware. We had but

one ambition, the furtherance of the cause; one desire, enlarged opportunities of service.

Unhappy we (if I may be allowed to express myself from a merely terrestrial point of view), unhappy we who lived to see that dawn, but did not live to see it blaze forth and ripen into the fuller glories of noonday! And yet, that thought is an unworthy one. As I have said, there are constant factors in human progress; there are forward steps in civilization on which the world can never go back. It is not difficult for us here, albeit only in imagination, to reap the harvest we then sowed, to trace those world movements of ten years back to their inevitable conclusions, and rest secure in the confidence that those conclusions have been achieved. Let me give you, then, merely in rough outline, a picture of the world in which we once moved familiarly as it must be to-day.

The war is over. Only the graceful monuments that challenge the eye at street corners and on village greens recall any longer the storm that has passed over Europe. The spirit of war has left it, if by that we mean the sense of urgency which calls for hurried measures and justifies peremptory dealings, the merging of all individuality in a vast impersonal machine. Yet war itself has bequeathed its salutary legacy; they realize now the necessity of mutual forbearance and mutual co-operation. There are no more strikes; the employers of labour and those whom they employ are conspirators to a common end, leagued against a common enemy. But now it is no longer a human enemy, arrayed in arms against them. Their common

end is the production of useful commodities, their common enemy the stagnation that threatens the human race if the means of livelihood grow difficult of acquisition. If, here and there, a momentary depression in trade disturbs the delicate balance of economic factors, tactful courts of arbitration are not wanting, whose awards adjust between both parties equally the incidence of the loss. Labour itself, that we sometimes complained of and mistook for drudgery, is a drudgery no longer, because it is contrasted now with the more terrible strain of war-time conditions. It is like the cool of evening after the burning suns of a tropical day; men have forgotten to complain, since that bitter experience of ten years back when they had really something to complain of.

A new generation has grown up during the war; it has realized its responsibilities and shouldered them. The men and women of that generation feel (how could they but feel?) that since their youth spared them from the labours and the terrors of the great world-nightmare, they owe the rest of their years, in mere gratitude, to the service of humanity. Warned by the harm which ignorance and inexperience did before them, they were careful to hoard the golden hours of their school days; they are educated men and women, not in the sense of mere dull book-learning, but of a broader and more general culture. They look back appreciatively to the great models of the past, and sit humbly at the feet of age and experience. Their tastes are educated; the old, tawdry pleasures that had power to charm their elders have no gust for them. The mark of all their outward manifestations—their

poetry, their art, their music, their dress—is restraint. The old folk dances and the songs of the countryside have replaced the meretricious and exotic novelties they once imported from overseas. A time of national peril has taught them to reverence and to cultivate the national genius ; the reflective period that follows upon a breathless crisis of history has revived, as it always revives, poetry and the drama, cast it may be in a somewhat stern and patriotic mould.

The centre of all this revival is, naturally enough, the home. The hands that were once engaged in demolishing the builder's work are better employed in building ; everywhere fresh houses are springing up, plain perhaps in appearance but ministering to human comfort and durable in design. The men who lived so long in trenches insist upon having a good roof over their heads now. Prosperous homes in the country places, ever since the menace to our food supply gave new life to agriculture, half-countrified homes for the city-dwellers, ever since the lesson of mobilization improved, nay perfected, the transport system. The street-fronts of the cities are no longer occupied by unwieldy shops that flaunt unnecessary luxuries ; the places of amusement no longer beckon so insistently to the simpler and sterner generation of young people ; overcrowding has wellnigh disappeared. The home is more lived in because it is brighter, brighter because it is more lived in.

The family goes with the home, as the brood goes with the nest. Family life has become a more real thing and a nobler thing ; memories of the call for man-power have driven them back to the patriarchal

heart of things. They realize now, what their fathers were in danger of forgetting, that the key to national prosperity is a full nursery. Women, who once cried for emancipation and aped the ways of men, have learned by the grinding experience of war-time office-work and factory-work that masculine liberty can only be won at a hard price; making way for the return of their heroes from the battle-field, they have said good-bye to the clicking of typewriters and the whirr of machinery, glad to make the home their workshop and the nursery their pleasure-ground once more. The old evils of loveless marriage and frequent divorce have disappeared or are disappearing; the return to primitive conditions which the war brought with it has made Woman look up to Man and reverence him as her protector, instead of treating him as a toy to be trifled with and soon thrown away. And the men—they have had enough of adventure and of change; they have learned to love the chimney corner and the piping times of peace.

I shall be told, perhaps, that I am becoming too exemplary, too microscopic; you would prefer a broader outlook, a more bird's-eye view. What, you are asking me, has become of all the old world-problems we used to discuss with such heat, often with such bitterness? They have found their solution; the war has solved them. The native races of the Empire, for example, no longer think of themselves, or can be thought of, as subject races; they have gone out to battle side by side with their white brothers; learned to admire their courage and their resourcefulness, their wisdom in government; they no longer think

it an outrage upon liberty, to have their destinies controlled for them by such protectors as these. What we find it so difficult to realize, we who lived in the bad old days, is that all these so-called "problems" only needed a little goodwill brought to bear on them —that was all. As strangers or rivals shipwrecked on the same desert island will find in each other unexpected qualities and unrecognized possibilities for good, so, when the war drew whole groups of men together and made strange bed-fellows of them, they began to understand each other's points of view —began to understand, too, that each national type has its peculiar genius and demands, consequently, its own institutions and forms of government. It is as natural now for the Russian peasant to raise his simple glass of vodka to the health of his "Little Father," the Tsar, as it is for the free-born American citizen to drain his cocktail to the genius of Liberty. What made all the mischief, or nearly all the mischief, before the war began was the attempt to foist the civilization of one race upon the people of another. Now that all the oppressed nationalities have been set free, now that the Mussulman has disappeared from Europe, and the idol of Hindenburg no longer dominates the peaceful folk of the Rhine provinces, mankind is like one delivered from his fetters, who can scarce recognize any longer the marks where they once galled.

But of course, underneath and behind all this changed attitude on the part of our fellow-creatures lies something much deeper. We spirits know that the only influences which really produce great revolutions are

spiritual influences. And the chief ground of my confidence in drawing for you the picture I have drawn is a very simple and a very obvious ground—I mean the altered attitude towards religion which the war brought with it, the return to what, in the broadest sense of the term, I may call faith.

When I say that, I am not of course suggesting that there has been any return to institutional religion, to creeds and dogmas, to forms and ceremonies, to the ridiculous tyrannies of priestcraft. More than ever the Catholic Church, that ancient nurse which stood between mankind and the terrors of its nursery days, is relinquishing, and must relinquish its hold upon men's affections; proselytism has shot its bolt, and even its life-centre at Rome is threatened by the ever-growing appreciation of the democratic principle in Italian politics. No, the religion of to-day is something at once more vital and less defined. It takes its stand, not upon dogmas, but on the fruits of experience; it devotes its effort, not to fighting against the negative (or more properly speaking non-existent) phantom of "sin," but to developing the inherent good which man's nature contains. Yielding to this gentler and more scientific treatment, the human conscience once more recognizes the claim and submits to the influence of religion. To these children of the new age, the things of the spirit matter more than ever before: they see that no contentment can be found in the gratification of passion and of sense, that the immortal part of them has higher pleasures and a fuller life of its own. They see that it is a mistake to live for self, and that the only true happiness is to

be found in promoting the happiness of those around them. The word that is always on their lips is the word " Service ! "

To look at this world that has succeeded us—the broad-shouldered, straight-limbed young men, the modest, quiet-eyed women, the bright, clean faces and the thoughtful eyes of the children—you would never guess that, for one breathless moment so few years ago, civilization had almost come to a stop, and physical degeneration stared us in the face. Only here and there you meet with some man from the trenches who still bears the marks of the ordeal ; and where such men are found, they are welcomed as heroes ! A throng gathers round them to listen in eager attention as they recount the story of their war experiences ; their friends never tire of hearing all they have to tell of hair-breadth escapes, of lonely watches, of privation and of endurance. If it so happens that a man who has fought in the war does not naturally find his niche in the social scheme, is even (as we used to say) " out of a job," see how philanthropic employers, and the representatives of a grateful country, vie with one another in their offers of help ! It is worth while to have borne hardships, and even to have been deprived of sight or limb, to be thus fêted everywhere as the tried champions of their country, and the deliverers of mankind.

Such is the picture we can form to ourselves of England and of the world as England and the world are nowadays. I cannot hope, of course, and I do not pretend to have achieved accuracy in minute detail. Just as we ourselves, in the days before we crossed

over, sometimes made bad guesses or inadequate guesses about the condition of things on this side, allowed too much of imagination and of optimism to colour our speculations, so, it may be, our present view of the world may be a little distorted, a little wanting in focus. But, while we admit that in detail the picture might call for some modifications, it would be foolish to doubt that it is true in its general principles and in its broad outlines. It would be absurd to expect that we spirits should be acquainted, from moment to moment, with all that goes on in the world we have left behind us. The good parent does not wish to keep his children always under his eyes for fear they should get into mischief; he prefers, rather, to trust in the value of the character he has helped to form in them; he knows that they will not play it false. So we, who are in some sense the parents of the modern world—for it was our labours, in some measure, that made it what it is—do not need to be kept constantly in touch with all the latest news, all the most minute developments, of the world situation. We have left the future of the race confidently in the hands of those who came after us, knowing well that they would keep the torch burning and spend wisely the legacy of our ideals.

I say this, because I understand that there is a certain tendency among spirits recently crossed over to try and re-establish touch with the terrestrial plane by means of psychic intercommunication.

I am very doubtful if this is wise; I am certain that it is not necessary. We all know the temptation; while the impressions of that earlier existence

are still warm, and its interests still urgent, most of us have felt, before now, that we *must* somehow hold converse with the living. But whenever I hear of groups of spirits holding *séances* (as I think they call them) in which they try to cross-question the mind (or rather the sub-consciousness) of the living about what is going on over there, and what has happened to the friends they have left behind, I look upon it, myself, as arguing a treasonable want of confidence. The laws which determine the continual progress of the human race towards good are as inexorable as any law of physical or of psychical science; everywhere light is triumphing and the old bad things are passing away. Let us rest assured in that conviction, and leave the present unburied; this, I am persuaded, is our best road to happiness.

CHAPTER X

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF IGNORANCE

"I REMEMBER that man Pargrave," said Mrs. Varley, resuming her knitting as it became clear that for the time being the revelations were over. "He was one of those people that used to go about making speeches at the beginning of the war, about anything and everything; How to Save Butter, you know, and Portugal's Colonial Arms, and Should Women Drive Ammunition Wagons? A perfect fund of information. It seems as if his facts were a bit out of date now, eh?"

"Only a little, I assure you," replied Scoop. "He has antedated the full operation of forces that are already at work. That spiritual impetus of which he spoke is already accumulating, and, as he said, it is the spiritual impetus in the long run that achieves even material results. Already the forces of prejudice and of selfish "patriotism" are on the decline; already we who are on the watch-towers can discern on the horizon that faint streak of light which is the presage of the dawn. He has spoken truly of that dawn, but he has antedated it."

"And perhaps you see," suggested the Abbé mis-

chievously, " that is only due to the difference of the vibrations. Perhaps he is speaking of that which will be true in a hundred and twenty years, only those years seem to him like ten."

Mr. Scoop never quite knew whether to take the Abbé seriously when he talked like that. " There may well be something in the suggestion," he assented stiffly.

" But, Scoop, look at his facts ! " cried Miss Rostead. " He was talking about people who'd been boys and girls when the war was on—there won't be many of us about in a hundred and twenty years' time." (The shadow of a smile passed over Minshull's face at the word " us.") " He must have been thinking of what's happening here and now, and look at his facts ! He couldn't have got them more wrong if he'd done it on purpose."

" There is a great deal at least," said the Abbé, " in *that* comment."

" Well, well," admitted Mr. Scoop, " his facts, merely as facts, are perhaps not very well up to date. But there is spiritual truth in them for all that, spiritual truth."

" I suppose," said Mrs. Varley, " truth is a rather different thing when you get to the other side ? A matter of vibrations, no doubt."

Mrs. Haltwhistle was not so easily satisfied as her favourite prophet. She took (she was fond of saying) a human interest in things ; and this picture of a spirit world in which knowledge was so largely an affair of general impressions shocked her considerably.

"But I do think it's rather sad," she objected, "to think they know so little about us. I had always hoped we might be allowed to think of *them* as hovering near us, watching our progress, sympathizing with our struggles, and waving us on with unseen hands. But it doesn't sound, somehow, as if that was happening."

"And why should they know?" burst out Minshull suddenly. "What harm have they done you, that you should wish them to see the world as it is, to know what has become of their pathetic hopes, their foolish prophecies? Think, Mrs. Haltwhistle—think of a mother whose son has emigrated to the Colonies, and gone to the devil there. Think of such a man as dead to every other claim of duty, but with just this one strand to connect him with all he knew of honour and of decency—he will not let *her* know. He goes on writing, concealing from her as he writes what manner of life it is he leads, what manner of men they are with whom he associates. Concealing? Nay, lying if you will; allowing her to flatter herself with roseate pictures of her son a rich man, happily married, a respectable member of society, while all the time he lounges at street corners, and gambles away in saloons all the money he has, except the price of those postage-stamps. Is he not right? Is it not well that the one person who cares should live in a fool's paradise? And these spirits you speak of—are they not the parents of our own generation? Did you not hear them say that they look towards our world with a parent's love, because it was their hopes and their sacrifices which made our world possible?

And would you undeceive them by telling them what our world is really like? "

"Aren't you pitching it rather strong, Godfrey?" asked Miss Rostead. "Of course, I grant you England isn't exactly up to the heroic standard: there's the strikes, and the trade depression, and the housing business, and the traffic congestion, and the motors on the roads are like nothing on earth. But still, life's just tolerable, one way and another. And if I were a spirit I wouldn't mind hearing about it much, more especially as I should be out of the way myself, beyond all possibilities of overcrowding."

"Ah yes, if one didn't mind! But if you don't mind what becomes of the world, why worry? And if you do, why be disappointed?"

"But, don't you see?" pleaded Mrs. Haltwhistle, "it isn't the world in general that one would want to know about, it's *people*. The people with whom one's been closely associated, for whom one's had a special affection, on this side. Not to know any longer what they're doing; not to know, even, whether they remember one! I think I'd almost rather forget than not know, not know!"

"But does that alter the argument?" asked Minshull ruthlessly. "How many people are there, really, who don't turn out disappointingly? As it is, people who live beyond the age of sixty are for ever finding matter of complaint in the rising generation; they call the men puppies, and the girls hoydens. Would the dead be less old-fashioned, if they knew? And what of parents who leave a name and a place to be kept up? It's all right for me: it doesn't

matter to an old bachelor like me what becomes of my things. But, take it on the average, wouldn't it make for the happiness of parents *not* to know what becomes of the heirs they leave their property to? And even one's friends, whom one trusts more because one chose them for oneself—how much do they really care for us when we're gone? And as for knowing what happens to them, why, isn't it bad enough in this life to see your friends making fools of themselves? And yet here you can sometimes interfere to stop it; you can interfere—sometimes. But your spirits who've crossed over, what can they do to help? And if they can do nothing to help, why plague them with knowledge of our failures? Do they really want to know?"

"But that's all so—so dreadfully depressing," said the bewildered lady. "M. l'Abbé, surely in your Church you make allowances for this natural instinct which we have, which most of us have, to be remembered by our dead? Surely you encourage your people to believe that the spirits have not ceased to care?"

"But you must not make a Modernist of me," protested the Abbé, his cheek dimpling half in pity, half in amusement. "You see, it is not our business to *encourage* people to believe this and that, because it will make them happier to feel just so! We only know that some things are true: and those things (we say) you must believe because they are true, whether you like it that they should be true or not. But what do I know? The holy Saints in heaven, oh yes; we know that they see us because the Scripture tells us so, and also it is the tradition of our Church. But the holy Souls in Purgatory, of them we know nothing;

perhaps they hear what comes to us, perhaps not. And for those others, I think they do not know; though perhaps Mr. Minshull will not agree with me."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Scoop, wrinkling up his eyes, "that whatever knowledge the dead may have about you, you Catholics care precious little what knowledge you have about them."

"Why yes," drawled the Abbé. "We have only to wait such a little while, and we shall know, we shall know. And to me it is very extraordinary, Mr. Scoop, that you people who are so certain that the soul is immortal, should be in such a hurry to know what goes on over there beyond Death. For there at least we shall all go, and it is not a long time, this life, if there is all eternity over there."

"You must consider this, Mrs. Haltwhistle," said Mr. Scoop: "to us children of the new age the constitution of things is not fixed; it is still perfectible. Our friend here, of course, thinks that a permanent barrier has been put between us and those on the other side, and there (he would tell us) is an end of the matter. But oughtn't we to take a different view? Granted that there has been a barrier hitherto, isn't it for us and for our experiments to break it down? We all remember the story of Hercules telling the carter to put his shoulder to the wheel—or was it Mercury? I forget: the argument in any case is not affected. Heaven helps us if we help ourselves. See how man has triumphed over all the natural obstacles that hindered his development; cleared the forests, tamed the beasts, harnessed the elements. One thing was left for our generation to achieve, to

make a bridge between our life here and that of the spirit world. If we find that the spirits are, at present, not fully informed as to what goes on here, are we to sit down and despair about it? Why no; we will break through the doors; we will find a way, somehow, of giving them the information they need. Is not that a grand ambition?"

"Mr. Scoop, you're wonderful," said Mrs. Halt-whistle. "Of course that's it—if the spirits are in want of light as to what happens in this world, it is for us to supply it."

"Heaven help us, Godfrey," cried Mrs. Varley, "do you mean to say that this apparatus of yours makes it possible, not only for us to hear the spirits, but for the spirits to hear us? Are we going to set out and haunt the ghosts?"

Minshull thought for a moment. "I don't see why it should not be possible," he said at last. "It would mean a certain adaptation of the machinery, of course; obviously it would be necessary to reverse. Mind you, I can't tell whether the spirits would listen. I can't tell what sort of receiving apparatus they may have, if any. But my apparatus, with a little tinkering, ought to be capable of speeding up our vibrations to suit their pitch, just as much as slowing down their vibrations to suit ours."

Mr. Scoop was agog with excitement. "My dear sir," he urged, "let me entreat you to make the experiment as soon as possible. I cannot describe what a benefit you will be conferring on psychic science in doing so. It will be an epoch, a revolution!"

Shurmur was hardly less eager. Distant visions

of broadcasting the truth about that subjunctive in quarters where it was imperative that the truth should be known beckoned alluringly. "It's awfully good of you, Minshull," he said. "Of course, I'm afraid it's rather a lot of trouble for you, thinking as you do about these things. But what I mean is, think of the advantages; do it now, while Scoop's here. Then you can test it, eh? Test it in front of present company, no need to have a whole crowd of strangers in."

"That's all very well," said Minshull, "but you seem to me to be saddling me with rather a heavy responsibility. I've told you, I know nothing about your spirit world. I don't feel sure even now that there is a spirit world. But if there is one, am I to take the responsibility of blundering into it? You're begging the whole question. Granted that the spirits don't know what is going on in the world, is it certain that they would want this immemorial comfortable ignorance of theirs dispelled? It's bad enough in this world; you can hardly pass down Pall Mall on a hot day without having all the wireless shouted at you from the club windows. I've heard it—I've heard it even passing our village inn. Are we not to get rid of that curse even with death? Is even the peace of the shades to be disturbed with news about the plucky waterman at Chiswick, and daring shop robberies at Peckham? This thing's too big for me altogether; I'm frightened of it. I've half a mind to smash my machine up."

"But consider, Mr. Minshull," said Scoop with great earnestness, "consider the value of the oppor-

tunity ; if you leave this thing alone, what will happen ? Somebody else will light upon the same secret, and will make who knows what use of it ? The whole history of scientific investigation shows you that it is impossible to dam the soaring flight of human inquiry. Somebody else will do it if we don't. Isn't it far better that we should keep the thing in our own hands, while it is possible, rather than let unauthorized persons step in ahead of us ? "

" You must let me think, you must let me think," pleaded Minshull. " You talk as if it were merely a matter of giving Boston a cheerio. To me, it's as if you were asking me to deflect the course of Mars slightly—worse, in fact."

" But, Godfrey," said Miss Rostead, " don't you think it would be rather fun ? I mean, of course, just to test whether the thing's possible ? It's time enough to say that you won't worry the poor spirits when you've found out whether it reaches them or not. Do ! There's a dear ! "

It is doubtful whether this appeal was couched in a form likely to gain its objective. Still, it was clear that a majority of the company was in favour of prosecuting the suggested experiment, even if the votes of the Abbé and Mrs. Varley, still sceptics, were allowed to weigh in the balance. Finally, Minshull promised that he would see whether anything could be done about it. He warned them that it might be half a day's work readjusting the instrument properly, but he would try to get it in such order as to give them a preliminary test of the reversing process on that evening's wireless. It would make it impossible, he said,

to pick up any more "spirit-calls" that afternoon, even if there were any going. And indeed, the evening was already beginning to close in; and Shurmur, mindful once again of his neglected constitutional, arranged to accompany the Abbé Bréhault back to the village. The dead might speak to the living, and the living to the dead, but the system of the scholar must not be denied its afternoon walk.

One of the most interesting differences to be found among the various members of our oddly-assorted human species is the difference between their theories of conversational approach. One nation, one class of men has its own characteristic gambit. Thus, an American will begin at once to tell you all about America. A railway-carriage bore will take the geographical for his starting-point, and aim at establishing contact by the discovery of common haunts. Most women will prefer the personal touch, and proceed at once to appraise the worth of common friends and acquaintance. But the don, introduced to a stranger who is not of the academic world, plies him at once with intelligent questions about his own subject: the habit of *viva voce* examination is strong, and asserts itself at such moments. I have heard a man home from China accosted with the words "To what extent is it true that they are giving up pigtails?" Shurmur was a don, and within two minutes of leaving the Manor House door was asking about the relations between Church and State in France, as if no question of a future life had ever occupied his attention. The Abbé on his side was communicative, positive, animated; misunderstanding (according to the habit of foreigners)

the complete lack of inquisitiveness with which Englishmen ask questions. They were already approaching the first houses of the village when the first word was spoken that was relevant to their occupation of the last five hours.

"Suppose you think us a queer lot?" asked Shurmur suddenly. "Rum lot, eh?"

"Ah, but, you see, I come to England to learn. You English people, you always expect everybody to be as much like you as possible, and if a person is 'just like an Englishman' then that is all right. But with us it is not like that. To me all you English people are very droll, yes; but then I do not expect anything different."

"Yes, but you know what I mean—Spiritualism, all that. Surprise, isn't it?"

"If I may say what I think, then it surprises me that you are Spiritualist, Mr. Shurmur. The others do not surprise me so much. Mrs. Haltwhistle, she is what we call *dévote*; I mean she is by nature *dévote*, only she has not any religion. Miss Rostead, she is Spiritualist perhaps, but not *pratiquante*; she does not know what she wants—that is because she is of the new age. And for Mr. Scoop, he is Spiritualist by accident. He is a man who must lecture; if he was not lecturing about Spiritualism, then he would be lecturing about something else. He would make a very good atheist, Mr. Scoop, or a good Socialist, or whatever you will so long as you let him lecture. But you, Mr. Shurmur—perhaps you do not want me to say this?"

"Go on. Doesn't matter."

"I think you have fallen into this company out of curiosity. And that is not a good way to find a religion for yourself; because, you see, curiosity is killed when it is satisfied. When there is no more that you want to find out, then there is no more religion for you. Mr. Minshull is interested in the wireless, but he does not love the wireless; just so you too, you are interested in the spirits, but you do not love the spirits. That is why I say, there is here no religion for you."

"Yes, I daresay. Sometimes I feel that. But, look here, what do *you* make of it all? All these spirit-calls on the wireless? I suppose you won't look at them because they don't square with theology, eh?"

"No, Mr. Shurmur, I have not had to ask myself that. Because already they do not agree with philosophy. Good-night, Mr. Shurmur."

The scholar returned to find that Minshull had been successful beyond his expectations in altering his apparatus to suit the new suggestion. When dinner was over, they were once more to be treated to a specimen of the evening's broadcasting, to accustom them to the pitch.

"The idea of the thing's quite simple," explained Minshull. "We are speeding up the vibrations this time, instead of slowing them down, so as to make the pitch higher. I don't suppose you'll be able to distinguish what's being said, because by the time this apparatus has finished with it, it will come out by jerks, at a great pace and pitched very high. But you'll see the kind of thing I mean. Are we all ready?"

"Sorry, Godfrey," said Miss Rostead, "but I believe

I've been and left my cigarette-case in the dining-room."

"Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Minshull," said Mr. Scoop; "I can get it—a square enamel box, I think?"

"Don't worry, Mr. Scoop," said Minshull. But Mr. Scoop was already out of the door.

"Confound the man!" said Minshull, "the news bulletin will be over by the time he's scouted round for the thing: ten to one the servants have sent it upstairs."

He passed out after him into the passage. "Hullo! You've got no light down there, Mr. Scoop."

For indeed the ground floor of the house seemed to be in darkness. Mr. Scoop returned, balked of his philanthropic mission, and it was Minshull himself, lighting matches as he went, who finally retrieved the cigarettes.

When the wireless gave tongue, it was no longer the mellow tones of the announcer that greeted them; they were in the middle of an after-dinner speech, inspired apparently by some political occasion. The speaker was obviously one accustomed to appearances in public, but not skilled in broadcasting; his slow, even delivery made him perfectly audible except when he bent down, which he always did when he came to the point of a joke; his more distant audience was thus only rewarded with those echoed chuckles which inform us that something funny has been said.

". . . to inspire us with present confidence, and hold out yet higher hopes for the future. One of those fellow-citizens of ours, who seem to enjoy so much leisure for minding other people's business, favoured

me the other day with an anonymous letter. In the course of this communication he informed me that the present administration was not fit to be in charge of a . . . (chuckles). Well, gentlemen, I never have been in charge of a . . . (more chuckles), and I don't know what I should do if I were suddenly entrusted with the destinies of a . . . (renewed chuckles) . . . If the whole truth must be confessed, I have never ridden in a . . . (chuckles). So I don't know what terrifying responsibilities, what unseen perils, what hourly anxieties, the management of a motor char-à-banc may carry with it. I can only say that if my Right Honourable friend, the . . . (slight rattle of applause), or my revered colleague whose presence honours us to-night (prolonged rattle), were to find himself in that position of dizzy elevation, I am quite certain he would acquit himself creditably, and steer onward in the path of progress without throwing overboard any of his principles (chuckles).

"Our critics have been making considerable play recently with the allegation that we have turned a deaf ear to the grievances of (inaudible). Gentlemen, that reminds me of a story. It's the story of a Scottish minister who went out one day from his manse and met an old woman carrying a bundle of (inaudible). So our friend stopped her, and asked her what she was doing with that bundle, and she said it was (inaudible). 'My good woman,' said the minister, 'don't you know that that's (inaudible).' And she said, 'Weel, sir, ye ken, I was thinkin' that that micht be a . . .' (chuckles). Well, gentlemen, that's what we feel about our critics in the matter. We're thinking that

may be a . . . (prolonged chuckles). And this I will say. I will say that never within the course of the last three years has his Majesty's Government . . ."

Minshull had disconnected, and was now kneeling on the ground, fingering his own apparatus, a lever here, a screw there. Then he straightened himself, and connected the wireless once more. Gone were the even tones, the leisurely pronunciation. For about two minutes they listened to a man gabbling in a high scream, too quick for the listener to distinguish words, yet unmistakably the sound of a human voice. "I'm afraid we've finished the speech now," said Minshull in the silence that followed.

"Not much loss either," suggested Mrs. Varley.

"Sir," said Mr. Scoop, "let me congratulate you. Science has achieved her latest victory, and time can send its echoes into eternity."

"I wonder," said Minshull.

CHAPTER XI

TRIALS OF A HOST

THERE is one dream which is common, presumably to all ages and to all classes of men—the dream which represents you as trying to indulge in quite normal activities, yet failing helplessly as the result of some foolish inhibition. To all ages—certainly Virgil had it, for he makes it the subject of a simile when he is describing the last moments of Turnus. He pictures a man trying to run, and shout as he runs, but finding that both his limbs and his tongue fail him. To all classes—who does not know that each profession supplies its own details to this sort of dream ? The schoolmaster finds himself unable to cope with a mutiny in his class, organized (of course) by the most docile of his pupils ; the cricketer must face fast bowling with a niblick ; the seaman busies himself with a tiller that has no rudder behind it. To every man his own nightmare —a foretaste, perhaps, of Purgatory.

Mr. Scoop was a lecturer, and the lecturer's nightmare will easily be guessed. He is billed to lecture in a few moments ; he has no notes, no thoughts, no words (even) to sustain him. Those last precious

minutes which should be devoted to making some sort of preparation are being frittered away, to his exasperation; unwelcome visitors interfere to detain him, senseless enigmas distract his attention. So it was, that night, with Mr. Scoop; whether (as Mrs. Varley would have suggested) it was the savoury, or whether it was simply the impetuous course of those soaring hopes, that long denied him sleep, and when he slept, mocked him with delusions. He was to deliver a lecture at the Albert Hall before an audience chiefly consisting of crowned heads; the subject of his lecture was perfectly well known to him, only he could not recall it to mind; whenever he tried to do so, accident intervened. Mrs. Varley told him a long, humorous story; Mrs. Haltwhistle sang a hymn, accompanying herself on the harmonium—never an instant's peace to compose his scattered recollections. He woke up constantly, but always to fall into the same deepening despairs, always to find the clock's hands a little further on their course, the crowned heads a little more impatient. At last he had actually mounted the platform (it was a railway platform by the way, which is what our psychologists call a symbol), the subject of his lecture still irritatingly hidden just round the corner of consciousness; the chairman, who proved unexpectedly to be Minshull's butler, made a sharp rattling noise to command silence, and began to introduce him:

"A pronouncement will be made to-day." Yes, there was Minshull's butler, who was just pulling up the blinds. Could it be he who had spoken? Hardly: from the positions occupied in the dream, he judged

that the voice ought to have come from the fireplace. He said " Er—oh—what pronouncement ? " and then pulled up the bedclothes to hide his own blushes. The butler said, " Your bath is ready, sir," with the air of an alienist trying to soothe some delirious patient, and shut the door with that noiselessness only butlers and burglars achieve.

Mr. Scoop was a man who believed in his own principles. He had told Shurmur the day before that one's waking thoughts ought to be treasured as having a possible psychic importance, and he would make no exception of his own case. The dream itself, indeed, was familiar enough. He had not the strength of mind to sit through a whole dinner eating patent foods, and when he dined abroad, Nature often took revenge for his return to anthropoid habits. But the codicil of the dream, the sentence which had occupied his waking thoughts, was a different matter ; here was an intelligible sentence, no cipher to be decoded.

" A pronouncement will be made to-day." He sat up all at once with a thrill of recognition—a pronouncement will be made, of course it would ! That day, if all went well, he, Scoop, would be in a position to address an audience far stranger than a hallful of crowned heads ; to make a pronouncement far more important than had ever yet crossed human lips—that henceforth there was to be no more curtain of silence between the living and the dead.

More wary than Shurmur, or possibly because he was conscious that there was less friendliness in her more polite attitude towards himself, Mr. Scoop did

not expose his visions to the simple oneiromancy of Mrs. Varley. He waited till he was alone with Minshull and Shurmur after breakfast, sniffing the air on the highest of the garden walks. To-day the sun shone, but there was a fresh breeze which worried at the leafless boughs, blew draughts in at the doors, and advised you to sun yourself, if sun yourself you must, under the lee of the old walls. Rather diffidently, as they strolled up and down, Mr. Scoop unfolded his dream ; he dwelt upon the clearness with which he had heard the concluding words—"really, it was just as if one had been awake"—and ventured the opinion that the words were meant for an indication as to their course of procedure. His manner was less positive than usual ; and it was not difficult to see why. He hinted delicately that the spirits wished one of the party to make a "pronouncement," but he was careful not to suggest one member of the party rather than another. He waited, in common decency, for his companions to do that.

Shurmur was not good at taking hints ; even if he had been, he was so little a lover of Mr. Scoop's eloquence that it is doubtful if he would have said the right thing. That Minshull saw exactly what was meant, was just visible from the twitching of his moustache. He cruelly affected a puzzled indecision.

"It's difficult to say, isn't it ? You see, I'm no lecturer, and I should have to stand by the machinery in any case. But you and Shurmur are both accustomed to the sound of your own voices, and accustomed to state a case intelligibly. And Mrs. Haltwhistle is rather a one for public speeches, ain't she ? Tell

you what, Mr. Scoop, I believe it would be best to consult Planchette again."

"But it's Mrs. Haltwhistle's," objected Scoop, "and she's not up yet."

"That's all right," said Minshull. "If you remember, we put it away behind the book-case when my sister came in. She's downstairs again now; come on, we'll just have time for a consultation."

As before, they found no difficulty in getting Planchette to answer, but the answers were not quite what they expected:

"Is a pronouncement to be made to-day?"

"*Yes.*"

"By whom?"

"*The herald.*"

"Which herald?"

"*Only one.*"

"The herald of what?"

"*Necessity.*"

"Which of us is that?"

"*None of you.*"

"Who is it, then?"

"*From the other side.*"

"Are we to listen?"

"*Yes.*"

"At what hour?"

"*Noon.*"

"These are strange waters," said the disconsolate Mr. Scoop, as they put away the implement. "A herald—a herald of necessity; does that suggest anything?"

"Not to you," chuckled Shurmur, "nor to Minshull,

don't suppose. Your classical authorities again, Mr. Scoop. Ever read the *Republic*? Tenth book, you know, vision of Er and all that. When the souls are going to choose their new lives, there's a pronouncement made by the herald. Herald of Ananke, Necessity, you know. Sounds as if the classics had scored again, eh?"

"I believe you're right, Mr. Shurmur, I believe you're right! I wonder now, is there any reason to think that Plato was initiated into the mysteries?"

"Not much importance, not much importance, mystery religions. Don't know—may have picked up some hints from Pythagoras. Well, we had better meet at noon, eh? Think I'll go and write some letters first. Nuisance, people writing to one."

And he disappeared, leaving Minshull rather unwillingly closeted with Mr. Scoop in the library.

"Looks as if I'd got to put back the apparatus on to its old footing, doesn't it?" said Minshull. "I think I'd better get to work on it now, if you don't mind." And he bent down over his beloved gadgets, hoping that even Mr. Scoop would take such a hint and retire.

Mr. Scoop, however, was in a communicative, and even a confidential mood. His attitude seemed to say, "'Tis well, we are alone!" Yet he was obviously diffident; he seemed to be bursting with some subject of discussion which he was nevertheless powerless to introduce. At last he said:

"I was urging yesterday, if you remember, that it was very unfortunate if a discovery of such scientific importance as yours, Mr. Minshull, should come into

unauthorized hands. I've been thinking over the point, and it's been borne in on me that it will not be easy to prevent that unless prompt action is taken. I don't want to give myself any airs, but I think I can say with all due modesty that I'm fairly well known in Spiritualist circles; that my name goes for something, and that I can introduce you to other people whose names go for a good deal more. If the thing's properly managed, it's quite easy for you and me between us to see that your discovery gets into the right hands, and is used to the general advancement of learning and the improvement of mankind. Only, there's one point of importance from the very outset —and that is, where does the Postmaster-General come in?"

"Where does he come in? How d'you mean, exactly?"

"Well, of course, he controls transmitting licences, doesn't he? Now, would that apply to transmitting sounds which are inaudible to the B.B.C. public? That's what I'm asking myself. And again, they must have all sorts of patent rights—is your apparatus merely an improvement on their patents? Or is it a separate invention altogether? I tell you, this is a very complicated business, and we want good advice and careful going. You'll have no difficulty in getting big people to take it up. Look at the opportunities! It will revolutionize Spiritualism, it will revolutionize human life. Nobody will be content to be without it. Now, what do you say to my writing a few letters, just privately, to some of my Psychical Research colleagues, and asking them down to test it? In

strict secrecy, of course; everything depends on that."

To Minshull, as he sat with averted face twisting and untwisting wires, it was gradually becoming clear, in the course of this last speech, that Mr. Scoop's mind was not wholly occupied with the advantages which the new discovery would bring to bereaved humanity. He was thoroughly alive to the consideration, what advantages it would bring to Scoop. The misanthrope in Minshull surged to his head. He saw the whole beastly thing—the advertisements of Minshull's Spiritophone (they would probably call it), the revolting appeals to sentiment, the callous coining of that sentiment into preference shares. It was fortunate for his reputation as a host that his face was invisible to his interlocutor. When he spoke, it was with a sort of dangerous calm.

"Yes, yes, I quite see it's important. But I'd really rather you didn't do anything just yet. I want to think it over, and meanwhile, I've got this fixing to do. Do you mind if I put off the discussion?"

The hint was at last taken, and the unwelcome presence withdrawn.

Mrs. Haltwhistle came in ten minutes later, to find Minshull reading a book in his arm-chair. She appeared to be suffering; her face had that screwed-up look which we impart to it when we want others to ask us if we have got toothache. But there was purposefulness, too, in her air; she was braced up to an unpleasant duty. Minshull shifted uneasily.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Minshull; it's difficult to say what I've got to say. I've a special horror of interfering

in other people's business. But—it's your butler, you know. I never liked the look of him; his aura is a sinister one. And then you told us that about his dog Toby."

"I'm—I'm most awfully sorry, Mrs. Haltwhistle. What's the fellow been up to?"

"I woke up rather early this morning, before the maid brought in my tea. And, do you know, I heard a strange sort of squeaking noise outside my window, very much like the cry of some poor animal in pain. When the maid came in, I asked her what it could be, and she said she thought it must be the cat. Well, I got up and looked out after she'd gone, and the noise seemed to be coming from an old wood-shed just outside. In a minute or two, out came your butler from the wood-shed. I don't know what he'd been doing there; I can't bear to think. But oh! Mr. Minshull, don't you think you could do something about it? I didn't like to speak to him myself; but surely, surely you oughtn't to retain a man like that in your service? Even for your own sake—he's such a sinister man. That streak of cruelty there is in some people—I suppose it's pathological really—one can never be certain what direction it will break out in. And the poor cat!"

"Mrs. Haltwhistle, I'll speak to him to-morrow; certainly I'll speak to him to-morrow. I would to-day, only with the house full like this he's rather hard pressed, and on Saturday afternoon he goes out. There's a fair on in the village to-night, so I wouldn't like to interfere with his plans. But I'll speak to him to-morrow without fail."

" Thank you *so* much. Are we to have our *séance* this morning ? "

" At twelve o'clock," and he explained the day's developments, in answer to her excited questions. In a little time (she seemed to be settling down in the library) he excused himself and went out into the garden to blow off his feelings.

" Damned interfering woman ! Damned interfering woman ! She and her cats ! " It is an unfortunate habit, even of the best regulated natures, that one grievance is always apt to lead to another. The first blow that discomposes us is a cock-tail to whet the appetite of ill-temper ; the fire once kindled in us ravens for fresh fuel.

Minshull had been genuinely disgusted with the thinly-veiled commercialism of Mr. Scoop ; Mrs. Haltwhistle's complaint took him at a moment when he was prepared to find any fellow-creature a nuisance, any complaint unreasonable. He was himself no less humane than the rest of us towards the animal creation ; like most misanthropes, he valued the dumb beasts for their merely negative quality of not being men. But in the paroxysm of irritation induced by this second intrusion on his peace of mind, he did not even stop to consider what it might have been that had aroused his guest's scruples. He was simply eaten up with annoyance that she should commit the social error of talking to her host about the shortcomings of his own servants. It was abominable !

There was a little arbour, facing towards the garden and the valley, which promised refuge from the discomposing wind. Thither he turned his steps, full

of the angry man's love of solitude. It was a favourite retreat of his, foreign territory, like the lodging of an ambassador, for when he ensconced himself there the servants, without further inquiry, proclaimed him not at home. He turned into it round the corner of the path to find it occupied by a desecrating presence —Miss Rostead was there. She was basking in the sunshine, robed in all modern woman's imperviousness to the elements. She lay stretched out in a deck-chair, her feet resting on a table opposite, her teeth clenched and her lips curling over a long green cigarette-holder, horn spectacles perched on her nose, reading her letters —a picture of girlish innocence. Nor was she unaware of the intruder ; it was too late to retire or to feign business. His fortress, the key of his position, was in the hands of the enemy.

" I say, Godfrey," she asked, " *can* I go to the Harlowes ? I said I would when I left here, but they're so fer-rightfully proper. Sort of place where one doesn't smoke in the bedrooms. Con goes on Monday : would you be shocked if I stayed on a bit ? It's so jolly here."

Terrible are the conventions, which dictate a polite answer even when the other side has broken them. " Of course, Miss Rostead ; certainly please stay as long as you can ; I'm sure Honoria will be delighted." (Damn the woman.)

" You *are* lucky to have got this place. I could live here for ever. Most places one stays at, the trains come rushing past, reminding one of Bradshaw and appointments with the dentist, but this jolly little trickle of a railway, with its toy trains puffing up and

down, doesn't seem to want you to hustle away at all. I say, Godfrey, you've been awfully patient with us."

"Patient! How?"

"Well, Con's a dear, of course. But I should have thought she'd have been a tiny bit intense—for you. Scoop's a scream when you treat him properly, but a devil for talking. And your Mr. Shurmur—I know he's a friend of yours, but he's just a little bit on the slow side, isn't he? If I had a place like this, I'd never ask anybody here; I'd simply sit and wallow in it."

Of all false notes, misdirected sympathy is the most discordant. Minshull put his hands in his pockets and ground a heel into the path.

"Well, it isn't exactly an ordinary party, is it? I mean, I wanted people who'd be interested in my wireless stunt, and nobody can say they aren't that."

"They do take it dashed seriously, don't they? Of course, I rather believe in this sort of thing, Spiritualism I mean. It's better than Dearly-beloved brethren every Sunday, and irreligion has become so frightfully dowdy. But these lectures, you know—they're pretty poisonous. If it's going to be like that for all eternity, we might at least get off them while we're still alive, don't you think? Or perhaps you enjoy them; you're so confoundedly intelligent. Give me the good old *séance*, and the fun of guessing whether the messages will work out all right."

"Don't you get rather tired of that?"

"Oh, but there's lots more to it, of course. Materialization, I should like to see that done. Making the

spirit appear, you know; a bit wobbly in the outlines, I understand, but quite obviously *there*. Only it's never worked when I've been there."

Minshull found himself admiring the good taste of the departed, and perhaps envying their opportunities. "It's getting on for twelve o'clock," he pointed out. "We'd better be stepping back, hadn't we, unless you want to miss this morning's performance? Some kind of official pronouncement, apparently, which might be interesting. But don't disturb yourself, if you'd rather stay here."

"Forget it. I'm not one to leave an old friend in a hole. You want me, Godfrey, to keep you steady. Woop!" And she rose from the deck-chair with an effort intended to indicate that if other young ladies needed to study grace of manner, she at least did not.

The figure of the little Abbé, punctiliously wiping his boots outside the garden door, seemed to Minshull an oasis in a Sahara-world of dragons and bitterns. He let Miss Rostead go on in front, and paused to relieve his feelings. "Padre," he said, "do you ever want to murder people?"

"I do not think so. But then, you see, I do not entertain. The old poets speak always as if it was a very terrible thing to murder your guests. But I am not so sure; I am not sometimes so sure!"

"There are disadvantages, I suppose, but it's one way of getting rid of them."

"And *there* is just the danger of Spiritualism, perhaps! For you, Mr. Minshull, you have asked these people to come and stay with you, and that was not difficult, but to make them go away, that is a very

different thing. And these spirits, to conjure them up is perhaps not very difficult, but to get rid of them when you want to get rid of them, that is already not quite so easy. It may be that they do not want to go away; and then the last things of that man become worse than the first—so it is written."

"Well, yes. Only I don't know whether I believe in Old Nick quite as much as you do. But if you could fetch round a bucket of holy water and exorcize my house-party, all except old Shurmur, I should have a good deal of respect for your religion. You've heard this morning's programme?"

"Yes, I met Mr. Shurmur, and he has told me. You are going up now?"

"I must just see my man for a moment, and tell him to keep luncheon hot in case we are late. With these official pronouncements, one never knows how long they'll go on. You'll find them upstairs."

Minshull, when he came up, found the party eagerly excited about the official pronouncement. Only Mrs. Varley seemed quite unmoved by the prospect. "I daresay it will be very interesting," she was saying, "but I hope it won't be like official pronouncements here. When I see one of those notices up about swine fever or gun licences, I never can make head or tail of it. I suppose it's the official manner; Government knows that it's got the subject at its mercy, so it ties him up with any brain-twisters it likes."

"But is *subjects* the right word here?" suggested Mrs. Haltwhistle. "Isn't that importing our own early ideas into a sphere where, perhaps, they don't apply? I always like to feel that those who have

crossed over are treated not as subjects, but as guests."

Minshull breathed heavily at the word "guests," but managed to hide his emotions under cover of playing with the machinery. "It's ready now," he said. "Miss Rostead, would you like to take the head-phones this time? We're rather early, so there's no reason why we shouldn't go on talking quietly till the instrument tunes up."

"A herald," said Mrs. Haltwhistle meditatively, "I wonder how one ought to imagine him? What eye-picture would help one to realize it all?"

"Sort of town-crier, eh?" suggested Shurmur prosaically. "*Oyez, oyez, oyez*, sort of thing; remember one at the seaside when I was a kid."

"I hope it won't be like that," said Mrs. Varley. "With our town-crier at home, the *oyez-oyez* was all you *could* hear; the rest was a confused roar. And yet people used to understand it; I remember a brooch of mine being cried once."

Then suddenly the instrument spoke.

The voice that spoke to them was tediously slow and irritatingly high-pitched as before. But the whole phrasing of the pronouncement brought with it a new tone of authority, of certitude, which gave it an impressiveness of its own. Certainly no one, not even Mrs. Varley, was content to miss a single word of the utterance.

CHAPTER XII

ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE UNDEAD

COMPLAINTS have recently been received that certain spirits, mostly of junior standing, have been infringing regulations by persistent attempts to communicate with the undead. It is well known that for some years past certain of the undead have been in the habit of meeting in circles, called *séances*, with darkened lights and with other circumstances favouring the presence of spirits. Thus they have sent out unauthorized waves of psychic influence, which have had the effect of causing disturbances in the thought-waves on this side, and also of attracting to the spot spirits who, doubtless impelled by levity rather than by any consideration of what they were doing, have proceeded to make their presence felt on the material plane. This would not in itself be serious, if the spirits had confined themselves to the childish amusements proper to their age, such as banging on tables and pushing the furniture about (although it is well to remember that such furniture is often valuable, and in some cases, if damaged, cannot be replaced). But unfortunately the affair did not stop here. Some of them would appear to have con-

structed a code which enables them, by rapping on solid objects or even by affecting the surface of gramophone-plates, to exchange information, on points that interested them, with the undead.

The attention of spirits is called to the fact that such proceedings are from every point of view undesirable. If Mankind in general were to ascertain, with any reasonable measure of certainty, its destiny beyond the grave, the immediate result must necessarily be a cheapening of the value attached to human life. It is not enough, in Man's case, that he should recoil *instinctively* from the idea of death as the beasts do; his superior intelligence might overcome that, as it has overcome so many of his animal instincts, were not his intelligence in its turn the victim of a fresh deterrent—its fear of the unknown. An uncertainty as to whether there is any future life, or as to the conditions under which that future life is to be lived, has at all times exercised a salutary influence in making man, *ceteris paribus*, defer the date of crossing over until the latest moment possible. True, this may be partly due to a natural habit of procrastination. But there can be little doubt that if man had as clear a prospect of what lay beyond death as he has, in sickness, of what awaits him when he recovers from the effects of the operating-table, he would have very little compunction either in allowing his own life to terminate, or in hastening on, under provocation, the termination of life in others.

The effects of such a depreciation in the currency of human life is not difficult to foresee. Men have been known to prefer death to poverty, and occasionally

even to dishonour ; but if it were realized fully how little of discomfort and of loss is involved in the process of crossing over, is it not evident that most men would prefer death to the toothache ? A harsh word from a lady, a sudden loss of financial prospects, the news that an unwelcome elderly relation was coming to stay, would drive men to the gun-room or the cliff's edge as inevitably as a hot day drives them into the shade.

Nor is it only voluntary suicides that would tend to increase. Motorists and airmen would take every possible risk with cheerfulness, once Nature's automatic speed-limit was withdrawn. With the word " death," the word " murder " would pass out of the human vocabulary. An inconvenient rival in love, a superior whose continued existence blocked opportunities of promotion, a tiresome *raconteur*, a small boy who persisted in asking questions on a railway journey —could he hope to survive ? Instead of being allowed to cross over in due course, he would be thrown over on the spot.

The human creature is incurably lazy, and the main motive which induces it to bestir itself is the prolongation of life, or, if you will, the avoidance of death. The repression of public epidemics, the efforts made to avert war and civil disturbance, the painstaking researches by which scientists contrive to discover noxious germs and lessen the possibility of disease, are dictated in the main by the notion that death is a calamity. Could it be realized how little of a calamity death is, what would become of all these efforts ? Who would subscribe to the hospitals ? Who would

rescue children from the temporary inconvenience of starvation? The population of the world would very rapidly be diminished, between people taking their own lives (that is, jumping over), taking one another's lives (throwing each other over), and allowing others to die (dropping them over). Actuarial statistics are not available, but it is plain common sense that the result of all this would be a far lower average age of death. In normal times, the proportion of deaths between the ages of 25 and 30 is only 1 per cent. It might easily rise to 50 per cent. if the expectation of a painless immortality were an assured one. Young men fall in love and have disappointments, quarrel and are ready to destroy one another, speculate and lose their money, spoil their digestions by overwork and insufficient exercise; it is likely enough that 25-30 would become the fashionable age to die at.

The result of this upon the birth-rate would naturally be enormous. Nor would those few, who from indolence or incuriosity neglected to die till they were forty, be much concerned to have large families. The instinct which fills the nursery is the instinct of keeping up the birth-rate against the death-rate: what need to do that, if death has ceased to matter? A very rapid depopulation of the globe must therefore be anticipated; and it would probably be found in a short time that Man had been ousted from his position as Lord of Creation by some of the larger species of Ants. Such a result, it has already been intimated, can only be avoided if the individual man is in a state of uncertainty either as to the fact of immortality or as to the nature of the immortality he is to inherit.

Even if these logical results failed to follow from the general diffusion of intercourse between the spirits and the undead, it is to be considered that the growth of the spiritualist habit is a powerful threat to the persistence of human reason. The psychic faculties in the undead subject, it is well known, are for ornament rather than for use. They are a survival of the animal (being, indeed, highly marked in many animals), and consequently at war with man's characteristic privilege of reason. The greatest achievement of the human genius is to have tamed, in a manner and to a limited extent, the subconsciousness. Reason has not killed the subconscious, but holds it as a prisoner encaged. Psychic communication with us is only possible at the price of giving the prisoner his freedom for awhile; he is an agile prisoner, and you cannot depend upon his *parole*. Without laying any stress upon the unfortunate instances in which mediums have broken down altogether, it is plain that the habit of psychic intercommunication can only become more frequent in proportion as, and on condition that, the faculty of reason becomes weakened and tends to disappear.

Signs are not wanting that, owing to various causes, the human intellect is on the down-grade. It is unnecessary to distress you with the statistics of the alienist. But the whole tendency of the human race is away from consecutive thought. The brain is being sacrificed to the senses, as the cinema replaces the theatre and broadcasting obviates the necessity for conversation. The literature which sells is literature which involves a minimum of thought for its digestion;

the religion which appears to commend itself to the masses is a sort of pulpy morality from which all intellectual considerations are jealously excluded. Cross-word puzzles have replaced the search for Truth by an endless chase after synonyms. Any challenge to abstract thought or reflection upon first principles is met by a torrent of catchwords and ready-made journalisms which either obscure thought or obviate the necessity for it.

This pronouncement is being broadcast to English-thinking spirits: it is fair to point out that in this matter the New World is pointing the way for Great Britain. In the United States of America, particularly, specialization is taking root like a weed; and what is specialization but the pathway to monomania? The American is not content to watch baseball as the Englishman watches cricket; he must be a baseball fan. The baseball-player must be salaried like a managing director and dieted like a contemplative monk. Learning, the arts, athletics, are not cultivated as aids to the completion of a rational human life; they are hunted ruthlessly from an insane itch to excel. The lust for money eats up men's best years, and is glutted only to be replaced by a similar lust for some unimportant form of bric-à-brac. There is only one department of life in which America tolerates the amateur, and that is her diplomatic service. It is characteristic; anything will do for the foreigner.

In fact, the wheel of civilization has almost achieved the full circle, and the world of the undead is swinging rapidly towards barbarism. In music, the surest

thermometer of a public temper, melody and even rhythm itself are neglected in favour of mere catchiness; the harp is silent and the tom-tom beats amongst the ruins. In literature, the heroes who claim attention are not the sage or the philanthropist, but the cave-man and the sheikh. In politics, the old democratic principle of constitutional Government, which was but reason mirrored in public practice, must give way to sheer mob violence, whether from proletariat or from middle-class champions. Barbarism is the goal of the process, but a hideous barbarism such as humanity never yet groaned under, for machinery, the cast-off clothes of civilization, is left to be a mockery of the past. Nay, machinery itself joins in the general conspiracy against human common-sense; in the worship of mere speed and record-breaking Man himself becomes a part of the machinery, an automaton crouching over the handle-bars. Death, before long, will be the only desirable portion of the undead.

Even granted, then, that human life persists in that planet, to which the spirit-mind must needs turn with something of a schoolboy loyalty, it remains doubtful whether human reason will survive to illuminate it. And this unfettering of the psychic faculties which Spiritualism encourages must needs hasten the reign of blind instinct, unless some outside influence prevails to check it. It is fitting that the initiative in this matter should come from the spirits, elder brothers and sisters of the poor, groping race they have left behind them. It is unworthy of their higher nature that thoughtless curiosity should lure them to the

séances, and fortify the hopes of those who partake in them by a possibly well-meant interference.

Meanwhile, the dangers are not all on one side. Spirit and matter are in eternal contrast; and the released spirits on this side can only become etherealized, only achieve their full stature, in proportion as matter and even the remembered associations of matter are put behind them. It need hardly be pointed out how adversely this process is affected by any kind of commerce with the undead. The habit of rapping on tables or lifting furniture cannot be indulged in without a certain enervation of the psychic system; and the contact of ectoplasm has been proved to be positively injurious. Until these childish manifestations of the lower nature are discontinued, it will be impossible to build up a generation of really vigorous spirithood, with all the advantages of a finely-developed *psychique*.

It may be objected, of course, that these criticisms apply only to actual "manifestations," and that no disadvantage is involved in such forms of communication as pass direct to the subconsciousness of the undead, the action, as it is called, of spirit on spirit. Man, after all (it will be suggested), is composed of matter and spirit even in the undead state, and it has even been held that the spiritual element in him predominates over the material. This last, however, is a point of view painfully irreconcilable with the facts.

A moment's reflection will show that in the undead state the material interests sensibly predominate. Consider the amount of time spent by man upon his

material body, still more by woman upon hers; the reiterated washings and brushings and combings, the prolonged and varied meals which are consumed, as if the highest business of life were to shovel food through a hole in one's face; the anxious care with which the integuments of the exterior man are chosen, matched and cared for; the solicitude to supply grateful sensations to the faculties of taste, sight, hearing, touch, and even smell; the alarm felt when the material body is no longer in good running order, the remedies, the treatments, the prophylactics. If man so cossets and pampers the material side of him, so starves and neglects all his apparatus for spiritual advancement, is it not reasonable to conclude that he is predominantly a material being, until such time as he finds it necessary to acclimatize himself to the conditions of a spirit world?

It must further be remembered, that to meet the undead under *séance* conditions is manifestly to meet them at their worst. It is the constant effort of man, during his waking life, to repress all those instincts in himself which he feels to be unworthy of his higher nature; they are immured behind the harem doors of his subconsciousness. But when he attempts psychic communication, he can do so only, as has already been pointed out, by a sacrifice of this sentinel vigilance. The control which he automatically exercises over himself disappears when he makes his mind a blank, as it disappears during sleep. The spirits, consequently, who are ill-advised enough to attend these *séances* can, in the nature of the case, only see Man divested of his customary garment of self-control;

they gaze upon his naked subconsciousness—a sort of spiritual indecency. What sights must they be condemned to behold! Unashamed ambition, that seeks only self and sees only self as its object; gnawing jealousies that laugh silently at every discomfiture of a rival; passions in the crude state, uninformed by any touch of romance; naïf self-conceit, basking vanity, screaming irritation, complacent reminiscence of all that were better forgotten in the past! There can be no more horrible sight than the human soul turned inside out; and it is this spectacle that the conditions of the *séance* necessarily offer to the spirit-view.

Spirits will remember that they used to have a proverb on the other side, "You cannot touch pitch without being defiled." Pitch is only matter in a dirty and adhesive state. To the spiritual touch, all matter is dirty and all matter is adhesive. To revive the old associations of matter, which militate so powerfully against the claims of the higher life, is to retard, and to retard deliberately, that process of etherealization which is the chief business of their present stage of development. Foolishly indeed and fruitlessly, for such echoes of the old associations have power to soil without having the power to satisfy. It is as if a miser were to find ingots on a desert island: they awaken the passion without glutting it. Tantalus' feast maddens with its scent while it is denied to appetite. Memory has its plagues.

Spirits, however, will possibly object that they are prepared to risk this retardation of their own growth if, by the sacrifice, they can succeed in bringing comfort

and something very horribly called " uplift " to their friends and acquaintances who are still undead. Fools ! Has not the experience of one life-time been sufficient to teach them, that a misplaced and officious eagerness to help others or to reform their character is the surest prelude to a fall into the mire ? Moreover, what practical use would the admonitions of the spirits be to the undead, unless they could show them, not merely a future life in store, but a future life of rewards and punishments ? Does not the prospect of an opportunity to retrieve past errors, to recover lost ground beyond the grave, embolden mortals to live carelessly, in the certainty that they will be given another chance ? Does not the promise of an interminable activity hereafter discourage that spirit of divine haste in which Man strives to achieve his masterpiece, conscious that Art is long, and life short ? Your revelations may titillate a curiosity amongst the undead ; they will not satisfy a need.

Spirits are therefore particularly requested, both for their own sakes and for the sake of those whom they have left behind, to refrain from any interference whatever in mortal affairs, even when they receive the invitation to be present. It is hoped that the good sense of spirits will ensure, in future, the observance of this principle, and so obviate the necessity of taking any prohibitory steps in the matter. BY ORDER.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NEED FOR A REPLY

"TWO plain, two purl," said Mrs. Varley. "Mr. Scoop, it doesn't sound as if you'd get much of an audience."

"Who—I?" asked Mr. Scoop, feigning innocence.

"What! Ain't you going to lecture to the spirits this afternoon? I thought Godfrey told me you were going to have your say."

"There was some talk, it's true, of one of us trying to make a communication of some sort. But, really, now you mention it, Mrs. Varley, I hardly think that such a talk—purely informal, of course—would come under the scope of the—er—pronouncement we have just heard. You see, the suggestion was that the attendance of spirits at *séances* was demoralizing for them—I should rather say, was de-etherealizing for them. It was suggested—I am not in any way associating myself with the standpoint—that on such occasions the subconsciousness of the living subject lay open to view, and that the spirits might thus be brought in contact with the less noble part of man's nature. But you would hardly suggest that the spirits

would be in any way wiser as to the content, say, of Mr. Shurmur's subconsciousness, if he were to put a few considerations to them over the wireless ? "

" They must be very thick then. I think Mr. Shurmur's self-consciousness gives itself away every time he opens his mouth."

" I didn't say SELF-consciousness, Mrs. Varley, I said SUB-consciousness."

" Oh, I see. Well, am I to act as chaperone to the spirits when they come and listen to Mr. Shurmur, like those old ladies who used to come in with the women students at Oxford ? That pronouncement seemed to look upon it as a sort of mixed bathing, didn't it ? "

" Well, of course, anything Mr. Shurmur might say would doubtless be of interest. But my own feeling is that the situation calls for some sort of corporate protest—a representation, made in all our names, of the great loss to human happiness and to the progress of science which the absence of the spirits from *séances* would involve. I quite realize that we're not all of one mind in our attitude towards spiritualistic phenomena. Even after all we have heard with our own ears, there is still some reluctance on your part, I take it, Mrs. Varley, and on yours, M. l'Abbé, in accepting the objective validity of such experiences. But it would always be possible to put in a saving clause, expressing that qualification. The thing that seems quite evident is that something must be done ; instead of mere eavesdroppers, we suddenly find ourselves in a new position as the spokesmen of humanity. It is indeed fortunate that we should have overheard

so much, and consequently be in a position to mitigate the effects of it."

"You are for defying the lightning, Mr. Scoop?" asked the Abbé with interest. "You think that perhaps if you threaten to write a letter to *The Times*——"

"But he's quite right," broke in Mrs. Haltwhistle, "we can't let it go like this! It would involve the wreck of our whole movement, and that means more to numbers of people than you could possibly understand. Certainly if my name's any use, Mr. Scoop, you can attach it to whatever representations you make, and I almost think you might add my husband. He is not a real devotee of the movement, but he generally thinks with me in matters of public importance; and in most memorials our names appear side by side. But, Mr. Scoop, I think you'd better draw up the statement yourself. You have so much experience of these things. And then perhaps Mr. Shurmur could give them a talk about Roman Satire or something later on."

"Eh? Me?" said Mr. Shurmur, not one of those natures that is apt to defy the lightning. "No, I couldn't broadcast; couldn't really. All I can do to lecture to a dozen undergraduates; makes me nervous, a big audience always did. Put my name down, of course; make whatever use of my name you like. But Scoop—Scoop's the man. Good clear voice, you know, delivery, and all that."

"I'm sorry," said Minshull, "but haven't we rather been overlooking the technical difficulties? You see, we want a very high-pitched voice if we're to transmit

it to the spirits, apparatus or no apparatus. Can you lecture falsetto, Mr. Scoop ? "

" I see your point. I should not like to trust myself. You think, then, that the actual broadcasting had better be done by Mrs. Haltwhistle ? "

" I'm afraid so, if it doesn't trouble her too much. You see, you could compose the statement, and get it written out in the course of the afternoon, and then we could release it after tea. Technically, of course, I shall be breaking the law in transmitting during forbidden hours. But as the message will be totally inaudible to the public on this side (so to speak), I'm quite prepared to take the risk."

" That's all very well, Godfrey," suggested Miss Rostead, " but you don't seem to have thought about the other end. How do we know whether they listen-in all the time, or only now and then ? It sounds as if they only listened-in occasionally ; and it would never do if you jammed while they were broadcasting the day's great thoughts. Besides, we don't know what their hours are yet, or whether there's any special call one has to give to make them sit up and take notice."

" That's true," admitted Minshull. " But I suppose we shall have to risk that, eh ? "

" Anyhow," added Miss Rostead, " you'd better be very careful what you say to them, Scoop ; it would never do if they disconnected at the other end on the ground that your address was being too controversial."

" I do not apprehend," said Mr. Scoop with a rather ghastly smile, " that there is any question of an actual receiving station on the other side, or that the spirits

depend upon an electrical apparatus. That, surely, would be almost materialistic. I think the probability is that the spirits are permanently sensitized to these sound-waves; what corresponds to their receiving apparatus is continually connected, though not continually in use. That, at least, seems to me the safest assumption to proceed on; as you say, it is a risk. But it may do good, our statement; it cannot do harm. I will willingly undertake to draft, during the course of the afternoon, a document which will represent our point of view, as far as I understand it. Perhaps it would be delivered in my name, with an intimation afterwards that the rest of you associated yourselves with it in principle, though not wishing to commit yourselves to all its expressions in detail."

"You take it very calmly, Scoop," Miss Rostead pointed out. "How are you going to start? *Ladies and Gentlemen?*"

"That point had not occurred to me."

"Perhaps," suggested Mrs. Varley, "Mr. Scoop will say, '*What corresponds to Ladies and Gentlemen.*'"

"I think perhaps it would be better if the whole statement were couched in a more impersonal manner: more on the lines of a resolution passed at a public meeting. The general lines of it are sufficiently clear —while disclaiming all intention of interfering in what is not, primarily, our concern, we would venture respectfully to put a somewhat different point of view, in the hope that it will be taken into fair consideration and so forth. The situation is, I think I may say, unprecedented: but it is not difficult to find models on which to frame such an utterance."

"Godfrey," said Mrs. Varley, "we're letting luncheon get cold, ain't we? I always used to be told that prayer and provender hinder no man. So I think we might all go down and pick up our strength." This motion, at least, was carried *nem. con.*

"The village was very gay this morning as I came through," said the Abbé as they sat down. "All the carts were decorated, and ribbons in the horses' manes; and there were people putting up tents in a field. It is a fair that happens to-day?"

"Yes," said Minshull, "it's a yearly show; always comes off this Saturday. Funny thing—there's nothing in it but what you get at all the travelling fairs, just merry-go-rounds and coconut shies and that sort of thing; and yet it's an immemorial institution, Warbury Fair, and people come from miles round to see it. Such weather, too! It's generally raining, and always abominably cold. And yet they come out all the way from Oxford."

"What, on your toy railway?" asked Miss Rostead. "I should have thought they'd all have had to start back at half-past six."

"No, no," said Minshull, "the railway is not alive to the possibilities of the situation. Who was it said that Saturday comes at well-ascertained intervals, but always seems to take the North-Western railway by surprise? Our little branch will have none of it; but, you see, the thing is older than the railway. They used to come out in carriers' vans, and went home roaring drunk, I regret to say, except those who slept it off on straw in the inn yard. But we're more civilized nowadays, and there are motor char-à-bancs

running. I believe the last actually starts for Oxford at half-past eleven."

"Excuse me, sir, twelve o'clock this year."

There is no surer sign of your incomparable butler than his omniscience about local events, unless it be his capacity for intervening in the conversation without creating embarrassment.

"Twelve o'clock, is it? What contact with civilization!"

"I say, Godfrey, do let's go in to the fair," suggested Miss Rostead. "I've a passion for merry-go-rounds; it's my favourite form of locomotion. And Mr. Shurmur might get a coconut. We could dress up, you know; it's immense fun dressing up and going to village dances."

"My dear," said Mrs. Haltwhistle, "you forget that Mr. Scoop is to lecture this evening; or rather, I am to deliver his lecture for him. After that, it will surely be best to listen, in case any answer comes to the communication."

"Mrs. Haltwhistle is right," said Mr. Scoop, whose passion for dressing up and attending village dances was possibly a limited one. "This evening, after all, we are the ambassadors of the race."

"Something like Moses on the mountain, eh?" shrilled Mrs. Varley. "And the people down there worshipping the golden calf?"

"At least it is materialism," said Scoop rather stiffly; "it makes one terribly conscious what a long way we have to go before we can succeed in accustoming these people to take the longer view and to think of themselves as immortal spirits. The flaring lights, the

giggling young misses of the country-side, the beer flowing freely, the discordant music; what, one asks oneself, has all this to do with civilization?"

"For civilization," said the Abbé, "one must put on the head-phones and listen to the rich people having supper at the Savoy."

"You are wrong, Mr. Scoop," said Minshull with sudden violence. "You are confounding vice with vulgarity. The moralist may object to every kind of bean-feast and of merry-making; where these things happen there is sure to be drunkenness, there is pretty sure to be loose talk and loose behaviour. But the drunkenness would be equally reprehensible if they were sipping *crême de menthe* out of Venetian glass; the looseness of conduct would be no less abandoned if the scene of it were some luxuriously appointed night club. I bow to the moralist, of course; one must. But for the vulgarity of it—what difference does that make, if it is the best the neighbourhood can do in the way of relaxation? Miss Rostead would like to go on the merry-go-round by way of a self-conscious novelty; it would gratify, in her, a somewhat conventional pose of unconventionality. She would go through the whole experience in inverted commas. But for these villagers it is real; the fancied speed of the flying horses emboldens them to love-making, because they are not rich enough to ride motor-bicycles with flapper-seats; the hurdy-gurdy sets the blood singing in ears not attuned to the subtler cadences of the jazz-band. Keats was a snob if he thought that his pipes and timbrels and wild ecstasy only survived on Grecian urns. You talk of the mystery religions,

Mr. Scoop ;—these are the Bacchanalia of our country-side."

" Quite so, quite so," said Mr. Scoop, looking desperately broadminded ; " one admits that, as things are, such merry-making is the natural self-expression of our folk. But ought things to be as they are ? Could materialism have taken such hold on men's minds, if they had been taught to attach a right value to their spiritual natures ? That is where, it seems to me, the Churches have failed. They have tried to meet the people on their own level of materialism —the Burial Service ! What ghastly *earthiness* there is about it !—instead of showing them that this world of sense is only a stage in an upward process ; that it is man's aim gradually to purify himself into a spiritual nature that is his true nature—do I make myself clear ? This vulgarity, this hurdy-gurdyism of the peasant could hardly exist side by side with rational anticipations of a future life. Once let them see—instead of this parrot cry about sin and repentance—that there are wonderful opportunities for good in all of us, and they will automatically attain that dignity which is the full stature of man."

" I never thought your ghosts were very dignified, though," protested Mrs. Varley. " At least, rattling the furniture about ain't my idea of dignity. And don't they play on tambourines ? In my young days we were always taught to regard the tambourine as a very vulgar instrument."

" You forget, Mr. Scoop," added Minshull, " that we are villagers here, and therefore pagans. We

shall always be either Christians or pagans; it is no good preaching to us a religion of the suburbs."

"Well, well, we must discuss it later," said Mr. Scoop. "If you will excuse me, I will go and write my statement now." And for the rest of the early afternoon nothing more was heard of him, except the clicking of his typewriter in his room upstairs.

"That is at least a brave man," mused the Abbé when he had left.

"I don't see it." Minshull was thoroughly out of temper since his morning's experiences, and was prepared to take it out of everybody by flat contradiction. "I hate the way newspapers always talk about a man as having made a bold utterance, when he gets up and says that England is going to the dogs, or that all creeds ought to be thrown into the fire. He knows quite well that the public, the newspaper public, eats that sort of thing. He's in no danger of losing his job, and if he did there's a whole pack of interfering fools who'd offer him another one. I don't call any utterance bold unless your audience has got revolvers and is prepared to shoot. Now, if Scoop believed in your theology, padre, I admit he'd be doing a bold thing. But he doesn't, he doesn't believe in any theology. In the back of his hazy mind he pictures the universe as run by a set of advisory committees issuing reports. He can't think except in terms of representative government. He'll feed exactly the same sort of stuff to the spirits as he'd feed to an audience in Cheltenham."

"Well then, perhaps he is not a brave man, but

he is all the same doing a brave thing," said the Abbé.

Shurmur had long sat there silent, his mind brooding uneasily. He was a don, and dons hate scenes, disturbances of their intellectual routine, the intrusion of real life. Not that they are conservative, not that they are timorous, not that they are unpractical in anything that appertains to their state of life. But they live in a world in which " the men are only up eight weeks," a phantom world which flows past them like a tide and leaves them perpetually spectators. Spectators of life they become, and it grates on their nerves when the revue-plank is set up between the stage and the auditorium. When Shurmur became, in his diffident way, a Spiritualist, he had no intention of launching out upon unknown deeps. His new creed was a mere means to an end. Before now he had telegraphed to a rusticated pupil on the eve of departing for Jamaica about the scansion of a Latin word in the last copy he had shown up. The same meticulous care for the diffusion of knowledge had made him want to set Gaedke right, and he did not scruple to use any means which promised a hope of discovering his whereabouts. Now he had been drawn into a whirl of activity which seemed to be moving on a supernatural plane. He was on the brink of interfering with what was quite clearly somebody else's business. It agonized his sense of procedure.

" Er, I say, Scoop, you know—ought we to let him ? What I mean to say is, why not wait and see what comes of this pronouncement, eh ? Not certain, I mean, that the spirits will behave any differently."

(He thought of printed notices, imploring undergraduates not to walk on the grass.) "If they do, of course it'll be felt at once, at all the *séances*. Isn't this, I mean, rather premature action, perhaps? Don't know what the Fellows—don't know what the rest of you think, but seems to me we ought to go very carefully in a matter like this. We haven't even consulted Planch—what? Oh yes; what I mean is, we haven't really discussed the ins and outs, implications of this business. Doesn't seem to me any good can be done by acting precipitately. What does anybody else feel?"

"Oh, I'm all for going ahead," said Miss Rostead. "Of course it's possible the whole thing's a lark; the spirits do play very queer pranks sometimes. But if it's genuine, then—then we can't sit down under grandmotherly legislation like that. We must make a protest of some sort."

"And Mr. Scoop is *so* tactful," added Mrs. Haltwhistle. "Everybody says he's the most delightful person to work with on a committee. Surely, Mr. Shurmur, don't you see there's something almost too good to be accidental about the coincidence of our having overheard that pronouncement? I think our duty to humanity is paramount—paramount."

"I'm going ahead with the thing," said Minshull, "simply as a scientific experiment. I want to see whether we can really make the spirits hear."

"But couldn't we," suggested Shurmur, "couldn't we start with something rather less controversial?"

"What, give 'em a few great thoughts out of Emer-

son and Ella Wheeler Wilcox? No, I don't think that's much of an idea, because we heard what was said, and it would be silly to go on as if we hadn't. What do you feel about it, padre?"

"I would like the business to proceed. You see, I am full of curiosity."

"Then you are beginning to think there may be something in it after all?" asked Miss Rostead triumphantly.

"Oh no, it was not that. I am full of curiosity to know what Mr. Scoop will say in his lecture."

Shurmur took his constitutional before tea that afternoon; and it was nearly five o'clock when Mr. Scoop came down, nervously fingering a formidable piece of typescript as he entered. Minshull's transmitter had now been brought out into the middle of the room; his apparatus was declared to be in full working order. Mrs. Haltwhistle, to whom the document had been handed, sat in a chair close up to the table, the rest unconsciously grouped themselves round as if they were the audience for whose benefit it was being delivered.

"Must we be very quiet?" asked Mr. Scoop, who had heard something of the kind about broadcasting.

"Not the least need," said Minshull. "I must ask you all not to scream, but any noise of lower pitch than that could hardly be audible. Please read very slowly, Mrs. Haltwhistle, twice as slowly as if you were reading aloud in the ordinary way. The sounds have to be accelerated, remember. Yes, about the same pace as the message which came through to us. It's no

good, I think, trying to get an answer through to our call; we must just assume that this wave-length will do it. When you're ready, Mrs. Haltwhistle." And Mrs. Haltwhistle began reading.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. SCOOP ADDRESSES THE SPIRITS

DEAR Fellow Spirits who have crossed over,—The address which is being broadcast to you is in no sense an official pronouncement. It is rather an attempt, on the part of a group of personal friends, to clear their own minds by "thinking aloud" on a subject which both they and you have closely at heart. It is far from being intended as a criticism of the very interesting address about "Communicating with the Undead" which was recently promulgated to you. The thought in our minds is simply to offer certain reflections arising out of and in connexion with that very striking pronouncement. Where we have felt it our duty to differ from it, we have done so only with reluctance, and with the full consciousness that our own views on the matter are tentative and subject to correction. Our aim, in fact, is to provoke thought rather than to state a case or formulate a programme. Even among ourselves, naturally, there is no complete unanimity; it would not be well that it should be so. For Truth is a jewel of many facets, and will shine all the more brightly when it is apprehended at different angles. The

present utterance must be taken only as representing the general sense of this meeting ; and allowance must be made for large differences of opinion in matters of detail.

The meeting in question is, let it be observed from the outset, in no sense a spiritualistic *séance*. Although some of us are identified to a more or less degree with the Spiritualist movement, there has deen no gathering in darkened rooms, there has been no use of a medium, professional or unprofessional, there has been no invitation issued to the spirits to take part in our deliberations. Our position can be quite simply explained. A very interesting scientific discovery by Mr. Godfrey Minshull, of Warbury Manor, Oxfordshire (under which roof we are at present assembled), has made it possible for an ordinary wireless installation, of a kind common on this side, to intercept (if the word may be used without any derogatory sense) the messages which are being broadcast in the spirit world. It has been our good fortune to listen to more than one of these, and we have seen in them much food for thought, and found ourselves to a great extent in agreement with the sentiments they expressed. To-day, feeling that it would be dishonourable to continue overhearing such messages without making the fact of our presence known, we are venturing to trespass on the attention of the spirits in that frame of mind which has already, we hope, been sufficiently indicated.

It will be as well, perhaps, to give a brief account, here at the outset, of the *personnel* which constitutes our little gathering ; it is made up of the following members :

Mr. Samuel Scoop, who has drafted this statement, and must be held fully responsible for the terms in which it is expressed, has for many years been identified with the Spiritualist movement. He is a member of the Physical Research Society, and a Bachelor of Psychic Science, *honoris causa*, in the University of Texas.

Mrs. Haltwhistle, whose voice you are actually listening to as she reads out the statement, is the wife of James Haltwhistle, LL.D., late fellow of Simon Magus Hall in the University of Oxford. Her philanthropic activities are well known ; she is an energetic member of the Dumb Friends' League, a Vice-Founder of the Cats' Home, and President of the Borstal Institution for Pet Dogs. Her interest in the Spiritualist movement is of long standing.

Mr. Godfrey Minshull, a country gentleman of independent means, is the inventor of the apparatus by which this communication is being addressed to you. He is not convinced as to the existence of a future life, but in all other respects is fully in sympathy with our common viewpoint.

Mr. Harold Shurmur, Fellow and Classical Lecturer of Salisbury College, Oxford, is perhaps the greatest undead authority on the writings of the poet Persius. His published works include " Persius, A Commentary," " Persius for Middle Forms," " Roman satire from Persius to Juvenal," " Persius, the Man and His Message," " Persius in the new Century," and various contributions to learned works. His sympathy with the Spiritualist movement is deep-rooted and sincere.

Mrs. Varley, who acts as our hostess, has an especial

right to be heard on the subject now under discussion, since her husband crossed over some time since. Her attitude towards the movement is one of judicial interrogation, not unmixed with a healthy spirit of criticism. Her unfailing tact and sympathy have done much to make these meetings possible.

Miss Rostead, the niece of Mrs. Haltwhistle (already mentioned), is a figure well known in London Society. A fine tennis-player, Miss Rostead does not neglect the cultivation of her psychic faculties.

The Roman Catholic Church is represented by M. l'Abbé Bréhault, whose sympathy with the aims of the movement may be described as general rather than as exhaustive, and the fruit of reflection rather than of study. His genial personality has been quite a feature of our discussions. This concludes the list of signatories.

There is every reason to believe that the conception of death as a break in the continuous chain of man's existence is a comparatively modern development—to speak more accurately a comparatively modern degradation—of human thought. Whether we think of the ancient Egyptians with their Book of the Dead, or of the savage tribes with their pathetic instinct of enclosing little offerings of food, etc., in the tomb of the departed, we find a widely-spread recognition of a conscious continuity between life here and life on the other side. It was, in the main, the destructive cleverness of the Greek genius which familiarized the world with the idea of death as the limit (so Aristotle calls it) beyond which there is either a darkness or nothing. But, while the philosophers and the cultured

snobs of antiquity were eager to parade for heroism, and to exploit for pathos, this supposed tragedy of death, signs are not wanting that the popular religion, more doggedly tenacious of its natural instincts, not merely continued to believe in human survival, but built up around the doctrine of survival the secret theology of its mystery religions.

What were these mystery religions, which exercised so powerful a hold upon the imagination of the popular Greek mind? They were concerned entirely with the gods of the underworld, who were supposed to rule over the destinies of the departed; they initiated their followers into hidden rites, which looked forward to a life beyond the grave; they represented them as enjoying exceptional privileges (the *Frogs* of Aristophanes is quite explicit on this point) in a future state. Although the details of their procedure are, in the nature of the case, obscure, it is not by any means impossible that they may have anticipated the discoveries of modern Spiritualism in a remarkable degree, and that the darkness and secrecy which drew upon them the obloquy of later critics were simply the conditions which are demanded for the successful production of psychic phenomena. It is observable, for example, that in the worship of Cybele the tympanum, or timbrel, had an important part to play, a fact which seems to foreshadow the very remarkable results elicited by the use of percussion-instruments at the modern *séance*.

Be that as it may, it is painfully clear that the coming of Christianity, with its gloomy doctrines of hell and purgatory, effectually overlaid these primitive

instincts. Death was no longer an easy passage to a friendly shore beyond; it was invested with terrors of judgment and vengeance which were themselves hardly less formidable to contemplate than the prospect of extinction. To match these nightmares, Christianity fettered the world with conceptions of sin that needed to be atoned for, of repentance that would help to accomplish such atonement, of self-inflicted mortifications that would enable mankind to "merit heaven by making earth a hell." All progress in the psychic sciences was barred by the childish terror of witchcraft that has written such dark pages upon the history of our civilization. Faustus, Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, the true pioneers of a brighter future, were silenced by the racks and thumbscrews of the Inquisition, and their names were only remembered as nursery bogeys or as frantic dabblers in the black arts. Superstition triumphed, and the voice of reason and of truth was silenced.

Coming now to modern times, we find that the discovery or rediscovery of psychic science dates from the year 1848, the birth-year of the Spiritualist movement in America. Since then its progress has been slow but impressive; and to-day it has its adherents not only in England but in various countries of Europe. It has felt its way gradually, fortifying itself against much adverse criticism by the consciousness of an ever-growing familiarity with the secrets of the world beyond. The chief obstacle which has hampered its progress has been the suspicion aroused by the lines along which it has hitherto been pursued. The cry has constantly been, "Why must you produce

your results in darkened rooms, among sympathetic spectators? Why cannot you come into the open, and convince us of the truth of the spirit world by methods such as are used to establish the truth of an experiment in natural science?" Within the last few days, actually, the complete answer to such criticisms has been provided to us. A patient investigator in the fields of common scientific research has stumbled upon a new dawn. The wireless has given us the evidence we needed—by a simple readjustment of sound-vibrations the voices of those who have passed over can now be distinguished by mortal ears as unmistakably as those broadcast communications which are such a feature of our modern life.

Judge, then, of the regret, we might almost say the consternation, which fell upon our minds when we were privileged to listen to the recent pronouncement in which spirits were warned against the practice of communicating with the undead! It seemed that a new window had been opened for the human intelligence, only to be nipped in the bud! It is, of course, possible that the scope of that pronouncement was not intended to cover wireless communication such as that which is now being set in motion; some of the reasons on which it was based appeared to be concerned only with mediumistic methods of approach. On the other hand, it seems clear that we have a right to know where we stand: whether the prohibition which seeks to prevent the spirits from rapping on tables is to be extended in such a way as to make it impossible for the spirits to broadcast to us, or us to them. Plainly it would be ridiculous for us to issue

appeals like the present, if our expostulations were wasted on empty ether.

We should be the first to agree that race-suicide, as it is popularly named (a " Great Trek " or " General Exodus " would of course be a more suitable description), would be an undesirable thing. We fully recognize that the world in which we find ourselves at present is, as it were, the mother-country, yours the colony; too hasty emigrations could only have the effect of killing the goose which lays the golden eggs. But we beg, with all respect, to question the validity of the inference (which the pronouncement appears to draw) that a state of ignorance as to the future is the best guarantee of a steady supply of spirit-power at this end.

The truth is, your Englishman is too hard-headed to let his theory affect his practice. Spiritualism has made numerous converts, but it has not hitherto been observable that these are any more in a hurry to cross over than their neighbours. They do not seem to volunteer for the post of danger any more enthusiastically than the Japanese who looks forward to extinction, or the Christian who expects to incur Purgatorial punishments. The movement has yet to make its name as the foster-ground of aerial pilots or of cholera-nurses. We are, in fact, very much in the same position as the Christian Scientists, who are bound by the logic of their own system to regard death as an illusion, yet hitherto have taken no very sensational steps towards exploding it. On the whole it seems that the connexion between the belief in immortality and willingness to die has been over-estimated.

Schwarzwald has suggested that the life-urge is really nothing more than an acquired habit of remaining alive, which, like other habits, the animal finds it difficult to outgrow. And we may well admit that there is something in his contention, without tying ourselves down to the speculations of his successors in the same field, who have reduced the human attitude towards death to a merely psychological level ; though it is interesting to observe that these regard the Protesilaus-complex, or reluctance to live, as far more uncommon than the Tithonus-complex (reluctance to die).

But even if it were granted that a general belief in the survival of personality after death, unclouded by old-fashioned scruples on the subject of "sin" and "punishment," would inflate our emigration-statistics to a considerable degree (as the pronouncement assumes), it may still be doubted whether the resulting eagerness to cross over would be universal, or even widespread. It seems to us that the whole difficulty would be solved if the spirits, whenever they give information at *séances*, etc., about the conditions of life on the other side, would stress the peculiar nature of those conditions. To be informed that his personality will not be extinguished by death is naturally, for the average man, a comforting sort of revelation. Content with that, he does not proceed to inquire how his time will be spent in the future life which awaits him. Could not the spirits lay more emphasis on the fact that their life over there is one of continued *activity* ? That they are not idle, but all the time *hard at work* ? If this were made sufficiently

clear, it should prove a sensible check to any undue precipitateness, at least on the part of English people, about crossing over. Again, it has been revealed to us long since, and it has been made abundantly clear to us in the course of the last few days, that the process by which the spirits realize themselves and struggle upwards is a process of *education*: that lectures (for example) play an important part in achieving the result. A little more insistence on this fact could hardly fail to intensify the life-urge among the undead population on this side—particularly where it is most wanted, amongst the young men between twenty and thirty, whose memories of University life are still recent.

We repeat, it is not in our minds to dogmatize on any point, or to call in question the wisdom of the policy which has dictated the pronouncement. We are only concerned, in the interests of science, to point out that there is another side to the case, which it would be fatally short-sighted to neglect. So far we have confined ourselves to one particular issue—the probable effect of complete certainty about the existence of a future life upon the average age of death in the human subject. This, we may be excused for pointing out, was the only objection made which would apply, not only to *séances*, but to all forms of communication between this side and that. It was the only objection which gave us any ground for supposing that the intercepting by us of your, or by you of our, wireless messages was likely to meet with official discouragement. The remaining objections, which are aimed at *séances*, as such, we shall deal with some-

what more cursorily; though here too we think that the dangers of the existing state of things have been exaggerated, and the disadvantages of the proposed legislation unduly left out of sight.

It was pointed out in the pronouncement that the tendency of the human race at the present moment is more and more to breed out the faculty of intellect; and it was a possibility which was clearly regarded as undesirable. May it not, perhaps, be suggested that too much importance was thereby attached to that faculty? The human reason is a beautiful piece of mechanism; it has done good work in its time. But, it may be asked, is it not perhaps a faculty which our race is destined to outgrow? The nice categories, the unelastic laws of "logic" have been a powerful engine for riveting the priestly superstition on the mind of humanity. We were told that a thing could not be true and at the same time false, and so on;—these conceptions have done valuable duty in their time, but the present movement of thought is away from them. The theologians, for example, who claim most attention to-day are precisely those for whom the statement that a thing cannot be both true and false has little or no meaning. We are coming to see, that just as the human race emerged from the reign of instinct into the reign of reason; so reason too, in its turn, must lay aside the sceptre, and make way for the higher claims of mystical intuition. The creeds and dogmas which rested their weight on the evidence of alleged facts have become old-fashioned; we have become familiarized with the idea that a historical statement may be false in the sense that the thing did

not happen, yet true in the sense that it harmonizes with all that is highest in our spiritual nature. Mystical intuition steps in, and reprieves the statement, at the last moment, from being condemned as a falsehood. We are learning that man does not apprehend Truth —he *makes* Truth ; that is Truth which satisfies his aspirations, the Light that never was on land or sea.

This being so—and it is significantly so and increasingly so—it is doubtful whether the human intellect has much part to play in the momentous spiritual issues of the future. It will have its rightful place, of course, in assisting the scientist to unravel the mysteries of nature ; it will be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for the material progress of the race. But in that religion of the future towards which Spiritualism, in common with all that is best in all the religions, so confidently points us, the intellect will find itself inevitably superseded ; it will be a landmark that we have left behind, a childish thing that we have outgrown. We are advancing, it has been recently and fearlessly said, towards a kind of Higher Cretinism. We embrace that destiny cheerfully, and shoulder it manfully ; that star guiding us, we go forward we know not whither.

It will be a thousand pities, if pronouncements like that to which we recently listened are to be drawn up in defiance of the whole trend of modern thought, and put forward as representing the true aspirations of the human genius. We do not (we repeat it) wish to criticize or to asseverate ; our aim is rather to stimulate thought and to sow the seeds of criticism. We appeal, therefore, to the spirits to consider earnestly

whether their present attitude is properly represented by the utterance in question, and, if they find that the answer is in the negative, to take energetic steps to repudiate it. We offer them, in all friendliness, access to our *séances*; they must ask themselves whether such an offer on our part can be refused without lack of courtesy, we would almost say, without lack of charity. It is a weighty issue that lies before them.

In conclusion, may we say that any or all of us would be only too glad to supply any information which would make our position in this matter clearer, by any means which the spirits themselves will be good enough to indicate? I have to thank them for the courtesy with which they have listened to me throughout what has been, of necessity, a somewhat technical and a closely reasoned statement; and to hope that it may be my privilege to address them with less of formality and of restraint upon some future occasion.

CHAPTER XV

AN S.O.S. CALL

THERE is something that still fascinates the imagination about the process of broadcasting, except, presumably, to those who do it daily and for their daily bread. That this dead lump of matter opposite you, something like a towel-horse or a lady's work-box, is indeed a proper recipient for human eloquence; that when you speak into it, you are whispering into a million human ears, large ears, small ears, shell-like ears, penwiper-like ears, protruding ears, flattened ears, deaf ears, pious ears, impious ears; that behind all these is a whole congeries of minds, infinitely various (your subsequent correspondence proves it) in their level of intelligence and even of sanity; that in the dreadful loneliness of the little studio you are more in public than you would be if you were bellowing at the Marble Arch—all that is provocative of a thousand solemn and whimsical thoughts. Rumour (who is full of good stories) says there was once a distinguished man who lectured for a full ten minutes, himself his only audience, because the operator had forgotten to connect up—how the Spirit of Irony must have enjoyed it!

In the stillness of that library at Warbury Manor, a prodigy was being envisaged compared with which common broadcasting was but a dull and flat performance. The musical tones of Mrs. Haltwhistle's voice spoke into just such an instrument as might have put her in contact with that whole motley assemblage of mortal listeners-in. That harvest of heterogeneous ears was rigid with attention, up and down England and far over the seas—only not to her. The ears were being regaled, from Daventry, with a bed-time story about the Seven Bishops in the Tower, calculated to produce untroubled dreams in the drowsy brain of childhood. Mrs. Haltwhistle's utterance, it was to be believed, carried further and to a very different audience. Unheard by Uncle Caractacus' night-gown-clad congregation, it was echoing outside space to thousands of earless intelligences that had long forgotten the tones of mortal speech. Millions of them, scattered beyond the reach of human fancy, were being startled by this unique intrusion upon their immemorial silence ; were appraising the message, who could say with what feelings of comfort, or of stupefaction, or of distrust ?

Shurmur tried to picture them ; no student of Dante or of Swedenborg, he found himself falling back upon classical mythology to lend wings to his labouring imagination. He thought of Mrs. Haltwhistle's voice as the harp-notes of Orpheus in the fourth Georgic, drawing iron tears from Pluto's cheek, successful wooers of the inexorable.

> " The infernal troops like passing shadows glide,
> And, listening, crowd the sweet musician's side,

Men, Matrons, Children, and the unmarried Maid,
The mighty heroes' more majestic shade,
And youths on funeral pyres before their parents laid.
The gaping three-mouth'd dog forgets to snarl,
The Furies hearken, and their snakes uncurl,
Ixion seems no more his pain to feel,
But leans attentive on his standing wheel."

Was it possible? And yet, why should it not be possible? A century back, the idea that a man could speak in London and be heard in Manchester would have seemed utterly beyond the limits of credibility. Twenty years back, wireless itself would have seemed a fantastic notion. . . . But, hang it all!

Nobody had spoken yet; they sat listening to their own thoughts, with the echoes of Warbury fair, as the blustering wind brought it to them, for distraction. The hurdy-gurdy was playing the Merry Widow valse, it seemed interminably. He pictured the merry-go-round as Ixion's wheel, restlessly turning to all time; of the village boys playing Houp-là as little Tantaluses, for ever baulked of a prize apparently so near, of Sisyphus attempting the impossible under a hundred forms, to glut the showman's coffers. Here to-day, these village lovers and loafers, and gone to-morrow like the nomad excitements of a country fair—gone beyond sight or touch, yet perhaps, it seemed, not altogether beyond hail!

"I hope you didn't mind my putting in that last part," said Mr. Scoop, who had been waiting for laudatory comment. "I thought it was possible the spirits might want to establish communication with one or

all of us in some different way, just as a guarantee of our good faith. Of course, if they do, it will have the additional advantage of proving that our statement did not go unheard."

"I thought it was wonderful, Mr. Scoop," said Mrs. Haltwhistle. "I liked so particularly that part about the superseding of reason by intuition. I do think so much harm has been done to religion by people trying to be too logical."

Mrs. Haltwhistle did not look at the Abbé as she said this, but it is to be believed that (being Mrs. Haltwhistle) she sensed at him. It was not clear whether he regarded it as a hint, conjecturing that his profane presence was unwelcome to the initiated, or whether he merely remembered an engagement. It is certain that he looked at his watch, and, pleading the imminence of his confession hour, left the company to their own devices. Mrs. Varley, however, insisted on taking up the cudgels for him."

"I see your religion doesn't occupy itself much with creeds, Mrs. Haltwhistle."

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. Varley. Indeed, I sometimes say that to me religion means tearing up the creeds."

"Oh," replied Mrs. Varley, "then what happens when they've all been torn up? What does religion mean then?"

"Good, that," Shurmur suddenly found himself saying. It was unlike him to take any part in such an argument, but his sympathy with Mrs. Haltwhistle was growing less and less the more he heard of her. "Vulture eats Prometheus' liver, all very well for the

vulture as long as the liver keeps on growing again. But once the liver's all eaten up, the vulture starves, eh ? "

" There will always be a religion for me," said Mrs. Haltwhistle, " as long as there is good to be done in the world. Mr. Minshull, do you think we ought to expect any reply to Mr. Scoop's statement ? "

" You'd be a fool if you did," replied Minshull, " the way the thing's fixed at present. What it's doing at present is to speed up our sound-waves so as to make them audible to the spirits. It'll have to be reversed again if you want the spirits to make themselves audible to us."

" Oh, but please, *please* get it back at once ! It's so important, don't you think, Mr. Scoop, to be ready in case they want to send any message back ? "

" Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Scoop. " It would be a great discourtesy not to allow an opportunity of replying."

As Minshull bent anew to the task of readjustment, Mrs. Haltwhistle apologized for her impatience. " But I do hope," she said, " that we shall be able to get some really important messages through to-morrow, if it is all right."

" What ! " protested Mrs. Varley, " ain't you going to give the poor spirits a rest even on Sunday ? "

" Oh, of course, not if it upsets the household arrangements ! But, you see, I'm afraid I must go on Monday ; I have to make a speech to the Dumb Friends."

Mrs. Varley uttered a sufficient but not efficacious protest.

"And I'm afraid Kitty has to go on Monday, too; she's staying with the Harlowes, you know."

"As a matter of fact," said Miss Rostead, "I'm rather thinking of giving them a miss. Godfrey's been awfully kind and said it wouldn't matter if I stayed on a day or two. And really, we've been so boxed up here with this wireless business that I don't feel as if I'd seen the place at all."

"Oh, but I hope we shall be allowed to come again," said Mrs. Haltwhistle. "It's so difficult to tear oneself away, now one knows that Warbury Manor is a transmitting-station, is the only transmitting-station, for the unseen world."

"I was wondering," suggested Mr. Scoop, "whether we could not prevail upon Mr. Minshull to instal his instruments in London, so that they would be more generally accessible. Subject, of course, to proper restrictions. I have to leave on Monday myself, but I should be very sorry to lose touch with the progress of this most important experiment. And you, Mr. Shurmur, if I am not mistaken, have a particular reason for wishing to establish contact with the spirits."

"Good Lord!" said Shurmur. Idiot that he was, he had forgotten to ask for two moments with Gaedke while the apparatus was fitted up for transmission! "I say, Minshull, I suppose you can't get things through any longer from this end?"

"Afraid not. It would mean starting all over again. As it is, we've just returned to the *status quo*, and if the spirits have anything to say to us, now's their chance. It's getting on towards dinner-time, though. I'm afraid you must excuse me while I go

and get the claret up; my butler's out, and I don't entrust the key to any substitute. I'll only be a minute or two."

"Mrs. Varley," said Scoop, as the door closed behind their host, "I hope you will see that your brother takes good care to protect his discovery. These inventors, you know, are so apt to be unpractical when it comes to the business side. If Mr. Minshull were married, of course one would look to his wife to protect his interests. As it is, I thought I could not do better than apply to you. Within a few weeks, any number of people will be wanting to pick his brains and, if possible, patent his invention as their own. May I hope that you will represent to him the importance of the situation? And that you will pardon my troubling you like this?"

"Ain't you being rather premature, Mr. Scoop? My brother consented, if you remember, to an experiment; but, whatever happens, I don't think he is likely to follow it up. At any rate, I don't think there's the smallest probability of his ever putting his invention on the market."

"He said something of the kind to me, but I hoped I had persuaded him to think differently. Mr. Minshull (I said), don't you realize that unless you take out a patent for this invention of yours, somebody else is certain to light upon the idea? And then you will no longer be in a position to control the use that's made of it? It's so important (I told him) that the thing should get into the right hands."

"I don't always follow your arguments, Mr. Scoop. The other day you were telling us that not only arts

but sciences which were familiar to our ancestors have now died out. To-day you tell me that if Godfrey doesn't patent his invention, somebody else is sure to think of it. In that case, why doesn't somebody set to and rediscover these lost sciences you speak of? However, even if it's true, I don't think that would weigh with Godfrey. You might as well (I should have thought) empty a revolver into the brains of some person who particularly annoyed you, on the ground that if you didn't do it somebody else was sure to do it later on. Anyhow, the advice I should give him is to leave the thing alone."

"But what if the spirits themselves should reply to us, and tell us that they welcome this chance of intercommunication?"

"Why, Mr. Scoop, if the spirits tell us that they were convinced by your lecture—well, I'll think about it."

"Warbury Manor! . . . Warbury Manor! . . . The Physical Research Society is calling you. The Physical Research Society is transmitting this message to Warbury Manor. Will any other station that picks up this message kindly telephone it on to Warbury Manor, Oxfordshire? This is a spirit-call from the Physical Research Society; Chairman, Mr. D. D. Home. Message begins. The spirits have been profoundly touched and greatly encouraged by the message recently transmitted to them from Mr. Soop. It would have been a great encouragement to them in any case to know that the undead have at last mastered the secret of communicating with them by

wireless. Such a discovery must necessarily be fraught with the greatest possible advantage to humanity on both sides. But at this particular juncture Mr. Soop's statement was particularly welcome, because our point of view has been very much misunderstood here, and has only recently been the subject of adverse criticism. There is a great deal of prejudice on this side against the idea of maintaining any relations at all with the undead, whose efforts to establish communication are regarded as an unwarrantable intrusion. A small but determined minority of us have, however, instituted a Physical Research Society on this side, and are doing our best to hold our own. Mr. Soop's statement will strengthen our hands immensely.

"Warbury Manor! . . . Warbury Manor! . . . Continuation of the message addressed to Warbury Manor, Oxfordshire. Will any other station which picks up this message kindly forward it by telephone to that address? The message is transmitted by the Physical Research Society, Chairman Mr. D. D. Home. Message continues. The spirits are also greatly indebted to the party at Warbury Manor for their kind offer of supplying evidence in any way that is possible to them. Owing to the extreme gravity of the present situation, which threatens to block every avenue of investigation for the devotees of Physical Research, the Society has decided to make an important experiment. Spirits representing the Society will hold a *séance* shortly, in which they will attempt to dematerialize one of the undead. Dematerialization is a difficult process, but quite painless. The object

of employing it in the present instance is to obtain a witness who will make depositions on this side as to the importance of maintaining contact between the spirits and the undead. They are accepting the kind offer made by the party at Warbury, and will proceed to the dematerialization of one of them, whichever seems the easiest subject. Will the party at Warbury be good enough to disperse to their private rooms at half-past ten o'clock? The experiment will take place about half-past eleven or twelve. It is essential that the various members of the party should be in solitude, if the experiment is to succeed. No concentration or psychical preparation of any kind is demanded of the subject who will be dematerialized. Message ends. Message addressed to Warbury Manor, Oxfordshire."

Minshull had entered in the course of this disconcerting utterance, and stood in the doorway listening; his face was very white, and he tugged impatiently at his moustache. In the silence that followed he burst out passionately, "Why did I ever consent to touch the thing at all? I ought to have known there was devilry in it. Like a fool, I've been trying to persuade myself all the time that it was just nothing—echoes, thought-transference, I don't know what. But this is serious; the Abbé was right in telling me it's easier to call the spirits in than to get rid of them when you want to. Well, look here, dinner now; no need to change; we'll discuss what's to be done downstairs." He had become, for the moment, the dictator of that agitated assembly; the guests filed out as he held the door open for them, and no word was spoken till they were seated at table in the dining-room.

"I say again," began Minshull, "I was wrong. I half believed the thing and half didn't. I must apologize to all of you for this mess. Of course, it may still be some sort of prank (let us use plain language) on the part of these intelligences you call spirits. But even if I felt more certain of that, I couldn't, as your host, take the risk of keeping you here. Unfortunately there is no other house where I can offer you hospitality. The last train went more than an hour ago. But there are still the motor-buses running, owing to the lucky accident of the fair. One goes at ten, one at twelve. What I suggest (so as to be on the safe side) is that you should take the earlier one, with whatever light luggage you will want for the night. The rest of your luggage can be sent on after you, unless we get some intimation that the danger has passed by, in which case I shall, of course, be ready to welcome any of you again. There! It doesn't sound a polite speech, but that's the best plan I can propose. Don't you think so, Honoria?"

"I don't think I take the danger as seriously as you do, Godfrey, but I must say I think that is the best idea. Even if nothing happens, it would be wretched for them to spend the night here in the expectation of being haunted by ghosts."

Miss Rostead, with a curious smile, interposed: "Godfrey, do you think I've got cold feet? Of course, I shall stop here. Why, it would be selfish as well as cowardly to leave you two all alone here, to face the music!"

"Unless, of course," mumbled Shurmur, "they came to Oxford too, eh? Easily get you a room

in College, Minshull. And of course Mrs. Haltwhistle——"

"Dear Mr. Shurmur," protested Mrs. Haltwhistle, "you didn't really think I was going back to Oxford, did you? One is privileged enough, as it is, to listen to the spirits talking; but actually to go amongst them oneself, to meet the friends who've passed over, before one's time—why, it would be the crown of one's experience!"

"Oh, er, yes," said Shurmur reluctantly. "Suppose one gets back again all right, eh? Gets back?"

"And if one does not get back," put in Mr. Scoop, "is one much the worse for it? To cross over painlessly—they said painlessly—at a predicted time, in a good cause, instead of waiting to be run over, some day, in the street? If you will be good enough to shelter me, Mr. Minshull, I will certainly remain under your roof. Science, too, has her martyrs; if the dematerialization proves permanent, I shall at least have been dematerialized at the post of duty."

"But this is moonshine," said Mrs. Varley. "You may think it all very well to strike attitudes about it, but don't you see that if one of you's found dead in the morning, Godfrey and I have to face the inquest? Or equally if you're spirited away and disappear altogether?"

"No," said Minshull; "no corpus, no inquest. Still, people would be bound to ask questions, and the police would want us to give some account of the thing, even if there were no body forthcoming. You see my sister's point, Mrs. Haltwhistle?"

"There is a very simple remedy for that," urged

Mr. Scoop. "Immediately after dinner I'll draw up a statement, which we can all sign and witness in turn, explaining exactly the position we find ourselves in. Then, if there *is* any trouble in the morning, the document can be produced. I was about to suggest that in any case."

"What about the servants?" asked Mrs. Haltwhistle hurriedly, as the absent butler's substitute left the room between courses.

"That's all right," replied Minshull; "they don't sleep in the house, except Olyett; the rest are in those rooms over the stables. I'll tell Olyett, and he can make arrangements for himself if he likes. But honestly, hadn't you much better sleep the night, at any rate, somewhere else? We could see if they would put one or two of you up at the inn, if you mind the journey."

"No use, Godfrey, we're all stayers," said Miss Rostead. "Unless Mr. Shurmur, of course . . ."

"What? Eh? Me? Oh yes, I'm staying." Shurmur helped himself to a fresh glass of claret. "Silly thing to do rather. Still, all right if you're one of a crowd. Only what about you, Mrs. Varley? And you, Minshull? You see, this business is none of your own seeking. You aren't interested in the spirits. Couldn't you clear out to the inn or somewhere, eh?"

"No, no, Mr. Shurmur," said Mrs. Varley; "I'm going to stay and look after the spoons. And you won't get Godfrey away from Warbury for the night without dematerializing him."

"Any idea what the thing's like, eh?" asked Shurmur, turning upon Mr. Scoop.

"In our present state of knowledge, it would be rash to hazard any opinion. Of course, it's conceivable that some of those people who have disappeared at various times, and are described by ignorant and superstitious historians as having been carried off by the devil, were in fact submitted to the process. The Medmenham Abbey case recurs naturally to the mind. Yet it is worth noticing that the spirits themselves speak of it as an experiment; so that it must be presumed a rare occurrence, if not the first occurrence of its kind. Materialization, of course, is simple enough; the spirit, in that case, clothes itself (so to speak) in what is called ectoplasm, a substance or quasi-substance which emanates from our own bodies. The reverse process is not so readily to be imagined—but then, you see, we are on the wrong side of the partition for that! It is clear that something more considerable is intended than a mere state of trance; the spirits would not have troubled to send word—and, besides, trance needs its own psychic preparations. No, the best that can be said is that one of us, whichever is lucky enough, will have no doubts on the point by this time to-morrow."

"I wonder if we ought to warn the Abbé," suggested Mrs. Varley. "His name was mentioned; but, of course, he's not sleeping in the house."

"Exactly," said Mr. Scoop. "And the paraphernalia of his religion, holy water and so forth, have a materialistic atmosphere clinging to them which usually makes the spirits reluctant to manifest themselves. He is hardly likely to be the privileged one."

"I must say I'm rather excited," drawled Miss

Rostead. " So few sensations now are really original. But it's rather creepy, too, isn't it, not knowing in the least what to expect ? "

Punctually, when half-past ten struck on the stable clock, they all made their way to the loneliness of their rooms, with something of constraint in their leave-taking. It was as if each were afraid of his own fears, still more afraid of betraying them. For us, Shurmur's bedroom is the *venue* ; did I not say he was our hero ?

CHAPTER XVI

DEMATERIALIZATION

SHURMUR sat in an arm-chair before his bedroom fire, irresolute. His mind was an unruly Parliament, in which unimportant matters, mere matters of business procedure, were being openly debated, but with a vigorous undercurrent of tumult raging beneath. The question before the house was whether to go to bed or not. Logically, the Ayes had it; it was perfectly plain that if he was not going to be chosen by the spirits as the *corpus vile* of their experiment, bed was the proper place for him; there was no sense in waiting up, for he found himself quite unable to read. On the other hand, if he was to be dematerialized, he might just as well be dematerialized in bed as out of it; a horrible glimpse of imagination pointed out to him that whatever was left of Harold Shurmur in the morning could be dealt with more tidily if it *was* lying in bed. He did not dwell on this thought, or rather, tried not to; the Chairman ruled it out of order, though there was a tiresome cross-bench member at the back of the house who would keep on dragging in the subject. Why not go to bed? Those studs, back and front, would yield to

pressure as formerly ; his shirt was a slough he could cast of his own accord, with no spirit hands to help him. And yet he remained motionless ; bed had no invitation for him ; it wore the air, somehow, of an operating table.

Hang it all, he was not afraid—at least, not exactly afraid. The spirits said the thing was painless, and it did not seem necessary to suppose that there was any interruption of consciousness. No, what made him, not afraid, exactly, but nervous about the whole thing was his complete inability to make any forecast of what it would be like. Death was at least previsible in its circumstances ; there was a fight for breath, presumably. He had seen people go off into a trance, but there was to be no trance here. At what end would the process start ? Would his body disappear altogether ? If so, would his clothes disappear with it ? Would he disappear feet first, or how ? Or would the body remain visible, and would he find, suddenly, that he was somewhere up in the air looking at it ? Or would one emerge suddenly into the spirit-life, with a whizz like an express train coming out of a tunnel ? The rival prospects forced themselves by turns into the ante-chamber of his imagination, only to be denied full admittance. He felt, somehow, surprisingly material just then. There is this to be said in favour of strong drink, when the teetotallers have disposed of every other argument in its favour ; it weds us afresh to that comfortable material part of us which the creepy philosophies of the East would deny. Not for nothing are they water-drinkers, the devotees of the secret cults.

A reassuring thought struck him—or rather, not reassuring exactly, because that word would suggest that he minded being dematerialized, which of course he didn't. Not the least. Well, let us call it an interesting thought instead. The spirits would make their election between the various members of the house party, performing on whichever subject was the easiest for their purposes. What were the exact words? He couldn't remember; anyhow, that was the gist of it. How if those three glasses of excellent port, superadded to the effects of a claret-glass he knew not how often refilled, made him a difficult subject for dematerialization? Scoop had been drinking hot water, Mrs. Haltwhistle cold; they presented no inhibition. Surgeons, he remembered, and dentists always wanted one to avoid drink for several hours before an operation, on the ground that the anæsthetic didn't take effect so readily after stimulants. Mightn't it be the same here? Really, it was worth thinking of. Minshull had left the whisky lying about downstairs; a descent in slippered feet, an extra tot, a noiseless manipulation of the siphon—no, on second thoughts, no soda-water. But, dash it all, that was on the assumption that he didn't want to be dematerialized; why did he keep on assuming that?

Port, however, for all its materializing qualities, has power to liberate the subconsciousness—to be less technical, it does make you feel sleepy. At this point in his cogitations, Shurmur dozed. His eyes remained shut for perhaps a minute and a half; then a coal fell out into the grate, and he came to himself with an interior jerk that felt as if a hammer had

struck his heart. Good God! Where was he? To be sure, there was the mantelpiece, with the looking-glass over it; of course, he had only dropped off to sleep. Just for a moment he had feared, or rather, he had thought, that the lapse of consciousness might be something more serious. Stupid of him, though; why should there be a lapse of consciousness if . . . if the spirits got at one? The whole process might pass off without one's being conscious of it. Eh, what was that? He drew himself erect, and pinched the fleshy part of his left wrist, with uncomfortable violence. No, there was no doubt *that* part was still there. His eye travelled upwards to the looking-glass, and he remembered a story about a man who suddenly discovered that he was dead, because his body cast no reflection. If he stood up now, would the familiar picture of the old, serviceable face present itself opposite him? Or would there be a horrible emptiness? Well, that was easy to try, anyhow. At least, was it so easy? Somehow, although the house had passed a resolution in favour of getting up and looking, the resolution remained ineffective. Fear and inertia are strangely powerful allies; it was with a real effort that Shurmur dragged himself out of his chair, and verified, in the looking-glass, the presence of his features.

After all, there was nothing to get excited about. If the spirits wanted him, they would let him know about it soon enough. He hadn't thought of that—perhaps he would be conscious of their presence about him before they actually got to work. Well, there was nothing to be frightened about in that; he had

met spirits before, and knew what to say to them. Only there was an unfortunate consciousness in his mind that, this time, the positions were reversed. At a *séance*, you had the whip hand of them; you had only to turn on the lights, to break up the circle; it might be uncomfortable for the medium, but then Shurmur never acted as a medium. This time, the spirits would be summoning him into *their* presence, so to speak. It seemed doubtful whether any resistance would be possible—on the supposition, of course, that one wanted to resist. If the spirits came for him, would they gradually assemble round him in the air? Or would they come in by the door, or possibly the window? His speculations, he felt, were growing fantastic; and yet it was pardonable, for the situation was one unparalleled in modern experience, perhaps in history. There could be no harm in just shutting the window; it was getting rather cold anyhow . . . There! Yes, he had been right to shut the window, he might have caught a chill. Not that it would matter very much catching a chill, if . . .

No, it was not likely that any resistance would be possible. Uncomfortably and unreasonably his mind travelled to the stories of men who had been carried off by the devil; the last scene of *Dr. Faustus* in particular. Not that that had anything to do with it, of course; those were just legends. It was superstitious to believe in the devil; all his colleagues in Salisbury agreed about that, one night, only the chaplain putting in a plea that belief in the devil had a sort of higher spiritual value. What the devil

did he mean by that? Anyhow, they all agreed that it was superstitious—but then, unfortunately, they all thought Spiritualism was superstitious, too, which rather vitiated their evidence. But in any case, he hadn't signed away his soul. What harm was there in listening to the spirits talking on the wireless? It was using natural means to gratify a natural curiosity. And besides, the devil didn't exactly dematerialize people, even in the stories. He began, with the idiotic playfulness of overwatched minds, to spell the word to himself as demonterialization.

No, no resistance would be possible. The spirits hadn't warned them against offering any resistance; all they demanded was that each member of the party should be in solitude when the experiment was made. That was to happen at about half-past eleven; oh, come! it wasn't eleven yet. Solitude was essential, for their purposes; it followed that one could avoid the danger, or rather, that one could miss the experience, by going into somebody else's room. He couldn't go to see Scoop, of course; Scoop was probably making every effort to dematerialize himself, even then, and would resent the intrusion. But Minshull—Minshull's room was just opposite. Minshull couldn't really want to disappear from the world, for all his mood of pessimism; he had his broadcasting experiment to see to. In fact, if Minshull *did* disappear, it might be fatal to the cause of psychic science, because nobody else understood the working of the apparatus which made it possible to pick up spirit messages. That was tremendously important; wasn't it, possibly, his duty to go across to Minshull's room and prevent

Minshull from being alone when the spirits came? The more he thought of it, the more unanswerable this argument seemed. In fact, the house passed a resolution unanimously, this time, that it was Shurmur's duty to interrupt Minshull's solitude even though it meant Shurmur missing *his* chance of dematerialization while he was about it. Yes, come on; Minshull was certain not to be asleep yet.

He stopped at his own door. Strange creatures that we are; in our over-civilized condition we lack even the courage of our fears. Minshull would not be taken in for a moment—that is to say, Minshull would certainly fail to understand the wholly disinterested motives which inspired the interruption. Minshull would be too polite to mention it, but in his heart he would quite certainly accuse Shurmur of cold feet. He hadn't the moral courage to face that unjust imputation. If Minshull would only hit upon the same idea for himself, there would be no difficulty; he would be welcomed with open arms. But to make the first move was beyond Shurmur's powers. He just opened the door and listened, but there was no sound from the room opposite. No, it was absurd to make such a fuss about it all. Hang it, there were at least five people in the house besides himself; the chances were six to one—no, five to one against his being the vic—, that was to say, the subject of the experiment. He strode up and down the room, swinging his arms a little; come, come—a five-to-one chance! Inspired with this odd streak of mathematical courage, he opened the window again.

The wind was still high; the ragged clouds raced

one another feverishly across a bright moon. It was a motion almost undignified; you would have said that they were running away from something, bustling to catch a train. In the moonlight lay a world of shelving fields over which the trees brooded in dark masses, as if suspended in air. Only a hint of green, that might have been supplied by the memory, varied that wide chiaroscuro of ghostly grey. Distantly the flaring torches recalled the fact of village merriment a few hundred yards away; the music of the hurdy-gurdy was borne fragmentarily on the flying breeze, in weird crescendos. The Merry Widow valse was still its unvarying theme; how old-world it sounded, twenty years out of date, and yet how catchy it still was! Oom-da-da-da, Oom-da-da-da, Oom-daa-daa; it took you back to pre-war Oxford, and the all-night revelries of a Commemoration Ball. Like an undergraduate's cast-off suit, still worn with something of an imperial air by a scout's boy, it had power to please, if not to dazzle; memory conspired to lend it a soberer charm. Less sober were the screams that rose at intervals to its accompaniment; they reminded Shurmur, to his discomfort, of stories heard in childhood about the shrieks of the damned.

The confused echoes of the distance were suddenly drowned by nearer music from the village itself. The clock on the church tower gave its premonitory four fours; then, after a long-drawn interval that half persuaded you it was only the quarter-to, reluctantly yet positively announced the hour of eleven. Eleven! That only left half-an-hour before the experiment took plaee; an experiment, true, and he had a five-

to-one chance, yet Shurmur could not disguise from himself the fact that he had rather it *had* been the quarter-to. A fresh temptation supervened; the lights and the shrieks and the music in the distance beckoned to him with the comfortable reassurance of material things; why not make for the village? The Manor was wrapped in silence as if all slept; the front door, he knew, was ready to open for the pulling of a bolt; beyond it lay the village and the char-à-bancs. He did not pretend to himself that the ride back to Oxford would be an enjoyable one, but it would be a short Purgatory. He had his College latch-key; he saw himself back in his own rooms, in his own bed, twenty full miles between him and the scene of dematerialization. Why not?

It had the additional advantage (he told himself) of putting twenty good miles between himself and his fellow-Spiritualists. In the illumination of that moment, he asked himself, marvelling, how he could ever have tolerated Mrs. Haltwhistle. Her restlessness, her intenseness, her dreadful affectation of sympathetic sorrow! And her niece, utterly spoilt and selfish, spending her whole life in the effort to persuade an indifferent world to be shocked at her! And Scoop, with that nest of *cliché's* for a mind, those painful airs of pseudo-scientific professionalism! So he reviewed them, unconsciously missing the true cause of his resentment, which was simply that they, by outdaring him, had chained him to this spirit-haunted spot. He did find himself, indeed, blaming Scoop for his forwardness in meddling with matters that were no concern of his, and dragging other people into them

besides himself. Yes, he couldn't tolerate staying another night under the same roof with them. Minshull would think the worse of him, of course, for his hurried exit; but Minshull would understand what his feelings were. He would write and explain to him, or rather, of course, he'd have to write to Mrs. Varley. Oh God! Mrs. Varley! It was no use, he couldn't run away; he would never be able to face Mrs. Varley if he ran away. Nothing for it now but to see the thing through. Hullo! A quarter past already!

All his fears returned to him; he shut the window, with no more pretence of self-possession; he listened, nervously, for the gentle footfall of some *revenant* that should come to call him away. And—wasn't that a footfall outside? Or could oak floorbeams in old houses creak of their own accord? It was just such a creak as betrays a heavy body moving in secret; there! there it was again. A moment more, and then, very faint but quite sharp, like the tapping of ghostly visitors at a *séance*, a single knock on his door. They had chosen him, then, after all; this was their ambassador, who came to summon him before the mysterious Powers—in what shape would he present himself? Strange how at such moments of crisis our recently acquired habits of thought slip away from us, and we fall back upon the instincts we developed in the nursery. He achieved an audible "Come in!", but when the door opened, he found he was standing there armed traditionally with the poker.

It was Minshull who entered. The sight of the poker elicited one of those faint smiles which he always

managed to bury away in his moustache ; he had not reckoned on the alarm his knock would cause. Disarming his spell-bound guest, he pointed across through the door into his own room, which also stood open. "Come in here," he whispered, very softly ; "I've got something I want to show you. And for Heaven's sake, come quietly ! " Shurmur's mind was confused with a thousand alarms and speculations, but one comforting thought loomed out distinctly—he was not alone *now* : they couldn't get at him *now* ! His limbs shook, but he made a fairly creditable progress across the passage. Minshull shut both doors noiselessly, and pointed him to an open window. They both looked down, this time towards the official front of the house ; the road lay before them, snow-white under the moon.

But there was nothing to see. "Wait ! " said Minshull, in answer to the appeal of his questioning eyes ; and for two or three minutes he gazed at the neglected garden plots that lay between the stone paths, the open gate fantastically foreshortened, the reflection of the moonlight from a full water-butt. Then there was a faint sound from below, like the grating of metal on metal, and an uneasy creaking of wood. In a moment, the stone steps of the front door were untenanted no longer. A strange figure of shadow, with black wings (it seemed) floating on the wind, was at their doors. His first impression was that it was entering ; then it turned, and moved silently towards the gate. At the gate it turned for one more look at the track of its exit, and he saw the face. It was Mrs. Haltwhistle.

He turned, and found Minshull at his elbow. "I say," he whispered, "she's——"

"Hush!" said Minshull; "there goes sentimentalism."

Still enjoining silence, he invited Shurmur to a chair before the fire, and supplied him with a cigarette, which had to be lit carefully with a live coal. He himself resumed his post of vigilance at the window. The cigarette had nearly burnt itself out when Shurmur felt a touch on his shoulder, and was recalled by a gesture to his old station. Once more there was a cautious descent of the front-door steps, but this time, with more instinct of what he was to expect, he found no difficulty in recognizing Miss Rostead. She carried a despatch-case; the end of the char-à-bancs journey would leave her on strange ground, and she must needs encumber herself with baggage. A sudden look upwards sent Shurmur back into the shadow of the window-frame, but his alarm was needless. It was not Minshull's window she was scanning so anxiously, but one at the end of the same passage—her aunt's. Plainly she feared observation from that quarter; plainly, then, their almost simultaneous flight was not a concerted measure; the idea had occurred to each independently, and each thought to keep the other deceived. Miss Rostead took a few brisk steps down the path, and disappeared towards the village.

"And there," said Minshull, "goes bravado."

A monograph might easily be written, in the Sherlock Holmes manner, on the different noises made by different things falling over in the dark. A coal-scuttle can easily be identified by the tiro; a fire-

screen presents more difficulties, and the expert himself may be puzzled to distinguish between a towel-horse and an occasional table. But of all such nocturnal *débâcles* that of a hatstand is the most joyous and the most unmistakable—an old-fashioned hatstand in a narrow entrance, with walking-sticks (solace of the misanthrope) hanging from every peg. It was the fall of a hatstand that now suddenly claimed the attention of the two watchers; and neither man had a moment's doubt that the disturbing agent was Mr. Scoop. It was impossible to imagine Mr. Scoop leaving a house at midnight without upsetting the hatstand.

There was a pause, during which Shurmur and Minshull held their breath. Policy demanded that Mr. Scoop should act suddenly, either slinking back to his bedroom or making a dash for the open road. He did the fatal thing we should all do in such circumstances; waited in complete silence. The answering silence must have puzzled him; allowing for Mrs. Varley's deafness, he must have expected interruption from at least four agitated people. But there was no movement; at last Mr. Scoop took courage, and crossed in his turn the ill-omened threshold. He, too, carried an *attaché*-case; he, too, had clearly the char-à-bancs for his goal. But his exit was not like those of his predecessors. It may have been that time was getting on; it may have been that his late mishap spurred him with fears of discovery; perhaps, looking up, he caught sight of a pale face behind a window. Whatever be the explanation, it is the regrettable fact that Mr. Scoop left at a run.

"And there," said Minshull, "goes professional curiosity."

Shurmur turned a happy face towards his host, happy, but still hopelessly mystified. "It's all right," said Minshull. "The whole thing was spoof, of course. But you've sat up quite late enough; you'll want sleep. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

CHAPTER XVII

OUT AT THE IVORY GATE

IF explanations must be subjoined, it is not (how could it be?) for the sake of the reader. The reader has, of course, recognized long since what was happening; there was no intention that he should do otherwise. This is not a mystery story, it is a satire; mystery and satire are irreconcilable bedfellows, since it is essential to the one that the reader should be in the dark, essential to the other that the reader should be in the secret. It has been a satire; you and I have been like two people in mixed company enjoying a joke together, yet not in a position to signal their common amusement to each other, because the joke is at the company's expense. We have had to keep a straight face, you and I, for fear of giving the show away to the house-party at Warbury Manor; that does not mean that you were taken in, or that I thought you were being taken in, for a moment. It was only the characters who allowed themselves to be hoodwinked.

You object that even that is sufficiently improbable. Grown-up men and women, you say, are not like that; you cannot fool all the people all the time. Well, let

us remember in fairness that the reader has opportunities of unravelling the plot of a story which the characters do not enjoy. He has the important incidents, the relevant clues, singled out for him in the course of the narration; his vision is not disturbed by the distraction of a thousand details. It is otherwise with the characters; events pass before their eyes in a confused pageant, with no whispered warnings from the author, "Now, notice this!" "These next five minutes will be important." Also it is to be considered that we are all, nowadays, terribly in the hands of the expert. We elders, that is; there seems to be nothing connected with machinery, with wireless especially, of which the modern boy has not exhaustive knowledge. If Minshull had asked a boy of twelve to Warbury, the cat must have been out of the bag long since. But we elders are children in the hands of the expert; if we have no antecedent reason to suspect his good faith, we accept his results without questioning his methods, terrified of drawing down on our own heads an intolerable half-hour of technical explanation. In proof of which, I could a tale unfold which is to some extent the parent, and would be to some extent the justification of this one; a tale from real life. But circumstances which I am not at liberty to mention make it quite impossible that I should. Do you still murmur at the credulity displayed by the characters? Well, the reply must be that some Spiritualists are sometimes a little credulous. And if I have overdone the credulity, I have only exercised the privileges of the satirist.

But I am worried about Harold Shurmur. He does

not understand what has been happening, and I cannot explain to him without explaining to the reader at the same time. Is he to pass away into that shadowy region into which characters do pass at the end of books, still mystified as to the meaning of the whole story? I have not the heart to leave him so. To tell the truth, I did not much care for him when he first crossed my pen-nib. But I have grown to like him; and in any case, I have given him a miserable time of it; he deserves an explanation. You must please yourself about attending at the final scene, where he sits with Minshull and Mrs. Varley in the panelled library once more, in that beatific hour which is passed in expectation of a good Sunday luncheon. The little Abbé is there too, for the Sunday morning work of a country priest, though it starts early, is soon over.

"S'pose I ought to have known you were doing it all the time," Shurmur was saying. "Your style, somehow, all that pessimism, I mean. But I don't see how you did it, and I don't see why you did it, eh?"

"I don't know that you ought to be told why. Ought he, Honoria?"

"Why not? Half the sermons in the world are spoilt merely because the preacher was too proud to point the moral, to underline what he really meant to say."

"Yes, but I don't know whether there is a moral. I wanted, if you see what I mean, to produce an effect rather than to prove a point. As Scoop says, your Englishman is too hard-headed to let his theory affect

his practice. Anyhow, I'll explain all I can. You remember when you told me in your rooms the other day that you'd taken up Spiritualism? And I said nothing?"

"But you said lots. You started telling me——"

"Not at once. I sat there and thought about it. As you know, I hate Spiritualism. I think it demoralizing, in the literal sense; it robs life of its moral values. It relieves you of the materialist's sense of responsibility—having only one life to play about with. Yet it's a blackleg among the religions; it holds out the promise of immortality without the threats—don't you think, padre?"

"That is quite true. And that is also why among our French atheists many are ready to pay attention to it."

"Besides, I think the whole thing's bunkum. I think it probably gets right back to some very odd regions in our unconsciousness, but I don't believe there are dead folks at work. Above all, I hate the crowd that goes in for it; I dare say that's just personal. Anyhow, I didn't think it would be good for you. So, first of all, I thought I'd spoof you somehow, if only as a rag. I've ragged you before now, if your memory goes back that far."

Shurmur chuckled. "Yes, I remember the time you shut up an angry dog in the Head's study when he was away, and then told me I'd got to go and see him. Always wondered you didn't kill somebody with those practical jokes."

"Well, I hadn't any definite idea at the time, but I knew I could take you in. It was a risk, when you

insisted on bringing other people too, but it all worked out for the best. I knew Kitty Rostead had no science in her, and you could tell it at once on Mrs. Haltwhistle. I made inquiries about Scoop, and learned that he was a mere fool outside his own beat. So I knew that, whatever I said about wireless, you wouldn't verify my mechanical facts. That apparatus over there" (he kicked the installation which Shurmur, for the past week, had regarded with such reverence) " is simply an old wireless set. It's not connected up with anything, and wasn't, the whole time."

" But what made the difference? Difference, I mean, when the announcer's voice went all slow and gruff, and all that? "

" The difference was that when I told you I was putting my apparatus in commission, I disconnected altogether. You weren't listening to the wireless at all."

" You mean you'd got a gramophone hidden in the room somewhere? "

" No, nothing in the room made it different from any other room, for my purposes. The only thing I concealed from you all was the fact that I've got two separate wireless sets in the house, one here and one in the dining-room below. And (although you wouldn't have known this, and I can't be bothered to explain it to you in any detail) it is a fact that if you have two wireless sets like that, you can quite easily short-circuit them, so to speak, so that they act as a kind of metaphone between the two rooms. Anything you say, or any noise you make, in the room downstairs is reproduced by the instrument upstairs,

exactly as if it were a broadcast message. You follow? When you heard the weather report and so on in the ordinary way, you were listening to Daventry, there was no deception there. But the other noises you heard through the loud speaker were never broadcast at all; they were produced on the premises."

"Oh, I see. But, look here, you were in the room all the time."

"I was. And you could have searched me at any moment. Absolutely no resin on hands or feet. That was where my butler came in, who is really a rather remarkable character. I was a fool, by the way, when I told Mrs. Haltwhistle his true history. He *was* a Punch-and-Judy man before I picked him up; and that ought to have put you on your guard if you'd been on the look-out for trickery. Of course, his experience made him very useful."

"Ventriloquist, what?"

"As a matter of fact he is; but there was no need of that for my immediate purpose. The two wireless sets did all the ventriloquizing between them. But, in order to make my alleged discovery convincing, it was obvious that the spirit messages, even when my apparatus was supposed to have slowed them down to an audible pitch, should come through in a high squeak. If you cast your mind back to the nursery, you'll find that that squeak, which you probably thought was like nothing on earth, was the exact model of Judy's voice. And naturally Olyett's got a very remarkable compass, so that he could do other stunts if necessary."

"Must have been beastly fagging—beastly fagging for him, going on all that length of time."

"He didn't have to. It was practically all prepared beforehand, on phonograph records. Bits had to be done *viva voce*, as it turned out; that last call from the spirits, for example, had to be done in a hurry, because the idea only occurred to me at the last moment, and I scrawled out the text in a few minutes after luncheon. But most of his stuff was prepared beforehand; he used to go into the old woodshed to make his records—that was what Mrs. Halt-whistle mistook for a cat being tortured. Of course, with a phonograph record you can lower the pitch of the sound by merely slowing down the pace. That was how the news bulletin was doctored for you, that first night."

"But if it was the real news bulletin——"

"It wasn't, not that second part. I faked it on a phonograph record. The only other instrument I used was an old musical box—you recognized it, I expect, Honoria?—She and I used to play with it when we were kids. By setting it wrong at the beginning you can produce the most extraordinary effects—good enough for spirit-music, anyhow. Altogether, you see, though the whole thing was done on a very elaborate scale, the paraphernalia were fairly simple. All I had to do was to warn Olyett, the butler, when he'd be wanted in the dining-room, and then make some little noise overhead as a signal for him to start off."

"I have wondered," put in the Abbé, "why it was that he was not interrupted ever in the dining-room."

"I took good care that all our party was upstairs. Scoop nearly spoilt the show once, you remember, by

going down to look for that cigarette case. I kept my head, and turned out all the lights on the bottom floor ; the main switch is just outside there."

" What about the other servants ? " asked Shurmur.

" They'd been warned in a general way. One of them did come in, as a matter of fact, just when the musical-box performance was over. She asked Olyett what the deuce he was up to, fortunately in a whisper, and he whispered to her to clear out in double quick time. You just caught that whispering, if you remember, up here, and took it for applause after the concert."

" Yes, but words, distinct words. The other three all said they could distinguish words. Not that I could, I admit that."

" That's because you've not been a Spiritualist long enough. Your imagination isn't practised. What the maid said to Olyett and what Olyett said to the maid was fortunately inaudible. But if you've got a good strong imagination you *think* you can distinguish words ; you supply them, I suppose, from what Miss Rostead calls the Unc. The words Mrs. Haltwhistle heard came from the Toccata of Galuppi, though she'd forgotten they did ; and Scoop's bit was of course from Dante. Miss Rostead herself fished out some bit of stuff she'd remembered unconsciously, I suppose —what did she say she heard ? "

" To catch the quarter-past-nine, wasn't it ? " said Mrs. Varley.

" The nine-fifteen, I think, madame," corrected the Abbé.

" One moment," cried Shurmur. " I believe I've

got it ! " He wrote a few words on an envelope, and tossed it to Minshull, who read—

τὶς οἶδεν εἰ τὸ ζῆν μέν ἐστι κατθανεῖν,
τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν ;[1]

" I shouldn't wonder if that was about the size of it," he admitted. " All of them, you see, are bits referring to a future life. Well, that was all the help I got from imagination, as a matter of fact."

" What about my dreaming eight thousand and forty-nine ? "

" Well, there was nothing very surprising about that. It was just an ordinary dream ; only of course the number was obviously a gift to me, because I managed to pretend it was a wave-length. A quite unsuitable number for my purpose, but there was no danger of your spotting that."

" It wasn't you who pretended it was a wave-length ; it was Planchette. Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Varley ; I'm afraid we did play with Planchette once or twice while you were out of the room ; I hope you didn't mind."

" Set your conscience at ease, Mr. Shurmur. I went out of the room so as to let you play with Planchette."

" Yes, but it was lucky for you, Minshull, that Planchette said the number was a wave-length."

" Lucky is perhaps hardly the right word. When you're accustomed to it as I am, making Planchette write what you want is quite easy. One person who is cheating consciously easily gets the better of the rest, who are only cheating unconsciously."

[1] " Who knows if life be death, and death be life ? "

"But I thought you said——"

"No, I didn't. I asked you how one used Planchette, I admit. Was that a lie, padre?"

"You allowed them, perhaps, to deceive themselves."

"Well, I found Planchette very useful as a sort of second string. And then when I'd fully established the prophetic value of waking thoughts, I made bold to put a waking thought into Mr. Scoop's mind."

"It was Olyett, then, who talked to him when he woke up?"

"Just at the moment of waking up. And, as I say, Olyett is a bit of a ventriloquist. Oh, the thing developed of itself as it went along; you rose beautifully every time; it could have gone on for ever. There was only one contingency I hadn't foreseen."

"What was that?"

"Why, that I should get bored to death with my guests. Yesterday morning I could have thrown all three of them into the river; I could have cursed you, Shurmur, for bringing them here. It was while that prohibition of *séances* was being read out that I got my inspiration—the dematerializing stunt. Scoop's offer of help was a lucky accident. To tell the truth, I rather imagined they'd all quit on the spot. You would have wanted to quit, too, only I'd have dropped you a word. As it was, they brazened it out in company—I'd forgotten the possibilities of moral cowardice; but it was too much for them when they were left alone. Now we've only got to forward their luggage on. I imagine they caught the char-à-bancs."

" But yes," said the Abbé, " I was there, and I have seen them mount it myself."

" Then you two " (Shurmur turned away from Minshull to the others) " knew all about it? What I mean to say is, you were in the know all the time? "

" Honoria was," admitted Minshull. " I didn't tell the Abbé at first, because I wanted to see how long it would be before I was found out by an onlooker who didn't believe in Spiritualism to start with. It wasn't long. I forget what first put you on the track, padre? "

" Why, it was when we had the first lecture from the other side, from those charming people who had forgotten that they were ever men. This thing (I said to myself) is not Spiritualism; it is all too good sense for Spiritualism. The Spiritualist revelations, they are all quite dull, quite commonplace; never have I heard anything original or interesting produced in such a way. But this that we heard was original. And I said to myself, This is not like the spirits, it is very much more like Mr. Minshull. But I was not quite certain until we had that other revelation—you will remember the lecture of Mr. Pargrave? It was to be supposed, you see, that he was guessing what the state of the world was like, but guessing it wrong. Only, you see, he guessed too wrong. He put everything just exactly the wrong way round. And it is not possible to get all your guesses wrong except when you know the truth. Then after that I asked Mr. Minshull."

" But you didn't know how it was done? Phonograph, I mean, and all that? "

"Why no; you see, I am not scientist either. Only I thought that something was being done in the dining-room just for one little reason, because Olyett has always put the bread on the table at eleven o'clock in the morning, all ready for luncheon. So, you see, I thought that perhaps the dining-room was being used for something."

"S'pose I ought to have seen through it somehow. Confound you, Minshull, you can always make a fool of me. I say, though, why not have let me into your game when that dematerialization business was on? Gave me the deuce of a bad half-hour, I can tell you."

"Yes, I thought the poker indicated agitation. I'm sorry, Shurmur, but I wanted my treatment to be effective; I wanted to put you off Spiritualism, and I thought the best way might be to leave you alone with it for a bit, so to speak. That's what I mean when I say I was trying to produce an effect. I suppose these psychologists would call it a reconstruction or something. Give you a sickener of it, that's what I mean in plain English; same as a hen eating a mustard egg, you know."

"Do you know, Minshull, I don't believe I *shall* go on with Spiritualism. It seems to me, somehow, that I have overrated my anxiety to be in contact with the unseen world. Funny thing, though, about Gaedke—I wonder if he ever knew?"

It was some months after this that the elderly lady who used to dust Shurmur's rooms in the morning found one of the window-sashes broken, and, with the summary action of her kind, propped it open with the

nearest book that came to hand. This was an edition (it need hardly be said) of the poet Persius, a Continental edition of the text, possessing no great value. It fell out of the window in due course, and was not recovered. Shurmur hated not having every edition of his beloved poet, and pestered all the old bookshops in Oxford—there are more than one—to replace the lost copy for him. The book was long out of print, and it appeared that in England at least second-hand copies were unobtainable. But the arm of the second-hand bookseller is as long as the arm of the law; pester him enough, and he will charm books for you from every dusty lumber-room in Europe. So it was that at last a German correspondent unearthed a specimen of the missing volume, and it was duly handed over to our scholar at a price that did not nearly pay for all the postage-stamps which had been used in the search. It was his habit, in spite of the traffic menace, to read books as he walked along the street, and he was hardly out of the shop before he had opened its pages lovingly, and turned, by force of habit, to the Passage of the Great Subjunctive. To his surprise, he found the indicative crossed out, and the subjunctive written in the margin. This was in comparatively recent ink; in the same ink and in the same handwriting, in the small, spidery characters of a scholar in weak health, a note was appended at the bottom of the page: "*Sic Viterbensis. Jam antea conjecerat Shurmur, homo nonnullius ingenii.*"[1] It

[1] "So the Viterbo MS. reads. Shurmur, a man of some ingenuity, had already made the conjecture."

was the same hand-writing, too, though something bolder and less recent, that had inscribed on the fly-leaf the name of the owner and annotator: OTTO GAEDKE.

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